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**PUBLIC RELATIONS ETHICS:
A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by

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Paul Stuart Lieber
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ABSTRACT

This two-part study employed 11 qualitative interviews, the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and a quantitative version of the five-factor TARES test to complete the first cross-cultural analysis of the ethical decision-making patterns of public relations practitioners. The DIT is an instrument based on Kohlberg's (1969) moral development theory, the TARES test composed of 14 self-enforced, ethical consideration statements derived from the research of Baker and Martinson (2001). Results indicate no statistically significant difference in levels of moral development and ethical consideration between sampled practitioners in Australia, New Zealand and the United States (Lieber, 2003). This finding argues for a vocational uniformity in moral and ethical reasoning across these countries despite geographic, cultural, economic and ethnic disparities.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE STATE OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY

Public relations is experiencing arguably its most dramatic paradigm shift to date. Mainstream Internet acceptance has ushered in Marshall McLuhan's (1965) vision of a global village and with it unprecedented expectations of public relations practitioners to service a new, worldwide audience (Fitzgerald & Spagnolia, 1999). Thus, modern practitioners are required to be global communicators, governed by a whole new set of personal and professional rules to accommodate this new role (Kemper, 1998). Within seconds a press release originating in Hong Kong is read by shareholders in New York City. Similarly, corporate web sites communicate messages instantaneously to an international conglomerate of stakeholders.

As trade barriers continue to fall and nations unite economically, globalization becomes more of a reality. The combined gross product produced by multinational corporations is an impressive \$2,535.6 billion, with these organizations employing 31.6 million people worldwide (Mataloni, 2003). Moreover, nearly 1/3rd of all U.S. corporate profits are generated internationally (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 2001).

With a global marketplace come increased ethical challenges. The stakes have never been higher for strategic communicators, as the aftershocks of an ethical mishap now resonate both worldwide and synchronously. For an increasing number of public relations practitioners, nearly every communications decision potentially carries with it enormous global consequences (Hatcher, 2002).

Discussion has begun on redefining public relations industry ethics to address its new paradigm. The field's scholars and practitioners are uniting in leading a dialog to tackle the ethical challenges associated with an international audience. The next step, however, remains to be taken. Tangible data on public relations industry ethics is sorely lacking in this modern era of global communication.

This exploratory study attempted to address this gap with its completion of the first cross-cultural examination of the moral development and ethical decision-making patterns of public relations practitioners across Australia and New Zealand. Results of the study were compared with similar, earlier research conducted on U.S. strategic communicators (Lieber, 2003). Via a combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative testing, the study looked for potential differences between these three populations, and assessed whether discrepancies – if any – were attributed to demographic, cultural, geographic, economic or vocational disparities.

This dissertation contains numerous segments. First, an overview of the current public relations landscape is presented, accompanied by discussion on the ethical and situational challenges accompanying modern day practitioners. Chapter 2 begins with a literature review of U.S. public relations history, followed by research on today's Australia and New Zealand public relations environments. Industry ethical codes for these three populations are critiqued, presented in tandem with the theoretical models and bases – most notably the TARES test (Baker & Martinson, 2001) -- that help to define the field's ethics across the globe. Traditional ethical models – used as guides for public relations vocational ones – are likewise discussed. The second chapter concludes with a review of scholarly work on moral development and ethics (Kohlberg, 1969), specifically

the widespread use of the Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest, 1983) to determine cross-profession moral reasoning. Motives for research and the 4 distinct groups of research questions are subsequently highlighted.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and procedure powering this research, beginning with its qualitative segment and followed by the quantitative DIT (Rest, 1983) and TARES test (Baker & Martinson, 2001) portions.

Results are offered in Chapter 4. Key themes are identified from the 11 qualitative interviews, with relevant quotes extrapolated. Next, the quantitative findings are discussed in context of the 4 research question groups. For each group, data from the current Australia and New Zealand populations are analyzed, followed by comparisons of these results to earlier findings from the tested U.S. population (Lieber, 2003). Crosstabs, correlations, ANOVA's, and factor analyses are used to help locate and interpret statistically significant outcomes. Finally, discussion of results and overall study conclusions comprise the dissertation's last chapter, Chapter 5.

THE DOT COM CRASH

The financial boom at the turn of century single-handedly redefined both the scope and paradigm of the worldwide public relations vocation. Countless corporations seeking to reap the benefits of a suddenly burgeoning global marketplace turned to public relations practitioners as their weapon of choice. Technology organizations in the U.S.' Silicon Valley employed strategic communicators by the tens of thousands, hoping to capitalize on the upward spikes in the NASDAQ and New York Stock Exchange markets. These public relations practitioners were assigned a single mission: to disseminate

information about the viability of their client's products and services to anyone who would listen (Freeman, 2000).

What an audience it was! Technology-centric media (e.g. *Red Herring*, *Business 2.0*, *Fast Company*, *Industry Standard*, etc.,) emerged in record numbers in both offline, printed methods as well as in online, Internet-based forms to serve as homes for the new wave of public relations messages. Advertising flourished in tandem, as companies fought to distinguish their voices from the seemingly hundreds of competitors vying for space within these new media outlets (Dumiak, 2000). The battleground grew fiercer, as supplemental communication efforts were implemented to counter competing advertising.

More public relations practitioners were hired, soon followed by the inevitable creation of even more niche media outlets to capitalize on this second growth phase. Again, advertising expenditures grew alongside public relations, hoping once more to serve as market differentiators among competing corporate messages. As could be expected, a cyclical process emerged. As public relations budgets increased in the elusive search for market differentiation, so did the related growth of advertising, and likewise niche media outlets to service these entities.

The cycle, however, ended abruptly. The investing public became skeptical of inflated technology stock values powered more by marketing messages than actual product. Many in the U.S. cited public relations for possible ethics violations during the market boom, accusing the industry of knowingly communicating via communication wizardry and stock-hype rather than fact (Lovel, 2001). Accusations quickly filtered across the globe, as public relations practitioners worldwide experienced a trickle-down

effect originating from the world's largest public relations economy (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2001). When the plug was finally pulled on technology investments, the results were disastrous. Public relations and advertising budgets worldwide were drastically cut as corporations shifted focus to simply surviving.

More importantly, both the U.S. and global economies fell into an economic swoon from which they still struggle to recover. Amazingly, this was only a prelude to years of strategic communication mishaps that would soon follow. High-profile accounting and financial communication scandals ushered in the new century, and with them a glaring need to address the withholding of information habits of public relations practitioners the world over.

FINANCIAL COMMUNICATION FAILURES

While many culprits lurk behind corporate information disclosure scandals, strategic communicators often bear the brunt of the blame. To the public, these individuals are the official mouthpieces for offending organizations, persons who willingly withhold and/or fabricate information even when aware of the potential consequences of such actions. The list of organizations and their communicators recently cited for these actions reads like a virtual "who's who" of the U.S.' NYSE and NASDAQ markets. In July 2002, John Sidgmore, CEO of former telecommunication giant WorldCom, confessed that the company overstated its earnings by a whopping \$3.8 billion over five financial quarters (Kadlec, Fonda & Parker, 2002). Internal reviews of WorldCom's financials uncovered fraudulent expense reporting used to artificially increase corporate profits. WorldCom stock fell from \$64.50 to 83 cents, costing

investors more than \$175 billion in the slide. Further, 17,000 jobs were lost in the WorldCom collapse.

Perhaps the most infamous of all information disclosure debacles occurred at Enron Corporation (Barnes, Barnett, Schmitt & Lavelle, 2002). First, employee pension funds were secretly used to buy out a corporate raider interested in purchasing the company. Second, dozens of phony sister corporations were used to help hide debt and inflate revenue numbers. Third, executives continuously pumped Enron stock while simultaneously unloading their holdings. In November 2001 the bubble finally burst when Enron was fingered for overstating earnings by nearly half a billion dollars. Less than a month later, the company filed the largest bankruptcy in history. Nearly every Enron employee was heavily invested in the company through their retirement savings, only to watch in horror as Enron stock fell from \$90.56 to bankruptcy. The severe consequences of partial truth telling had never been clearer.

SELECTIVE TRUTH TELLING

Despite the fallout at both WorldCom and Enron, little or no formal discussion remains within public relations industry codes (discussed below in greater detail) on the practice of partial truth telling. This absence, however, is not surprising. First, pragmatically speaking, anyone – regardless of profession – will lie and/or withhold information if faced with sufficient pressure and/or incentive (Kornet, 1997). Most individuals, according to DePaulo and Bell (1996), lie 1-2 times a day and to about 30 percent of all persons they encounter weekly on a one-on-one basis. Second, in most instances the practice of selective truth telling is completely legal, and no punitive measures are in place for those who engage in it even inappropriately. Third, selective

truth telling provides a competitive edge to the strategic communicator and for the issue he/she is advocating; to refrain from this practice grants the issue opponent with an unnecessary advantage. Last, while a perfect symmetry of service to both client and society is the end goal for the public relations practitioner, the realities of the profession often find this symmetry disrupted. The “bills have to be paid” somehow, and the client’s interests will ultimately take precedence in both public relations and other advocacy-driven professions. Thus, withholding of information is seen as almost inevitable purely for financial reasons.

The ethical difference between withholding of truth and telling a lie is often a very fine line. While a blatant lie might be deemed poor moral behavior in business circles, the practice of “bluffing” however, is not. Bluffing -- the conscious misstatement, concealment of relevant facts, or exaggeration -- is an accepted negotiation strategy used by all types of issue advocates ranging from labor unions to governmental officials (Carr, 1968). According to Carr, business bluffing should be viewed the same way as it is in poker: as game strategy and not a reflection of the bluffer’s morality. Bok (1989) agreed, placing primary ethical importance on the intent to deceive, rather than defining a lie by the words used or the falseness of information.

Carr saw bluffing not only as permissible but a necessary part in achieving negotiation success. Akin to withholding information, in public relations, bluffing is a completely legal activity. Refusing to perform either practice based on ethical grounds unnecessarily places your faction at a distinct disadvantage. Even if caught, the penalty for bluffing is usually insufficient enough to discourage its use (Wokutch & Carlson, 1981).

Although lacking punitive measures, bluffing could be perceived as self-regulatory. In business circles, individuals and/or organizations that get caught excessively bluffing are not very likely to acquire further business from those they bluffed out of fear of getting lied to once again (Wokutch & Carlson, 1981). Similarly, in the financial sector, unadulterated bluffing is more likely to result in “cease and desist” orders than actual sanctions (Carr, 1968).

Unadulterated bluffing and/or selective truth telling, however, do have consequences. As evidenced by the events at WorldCom and Enron, these actions have the potential to destroy organizations, their investors, and to cripple a national economy. Yet these practices continue. Rarely a week goes by without another billion-dollar corporation restating its quarterly or yearly earnings. As a result, public relations practitioners acting as voices for the world’s corporations exist under an ethical microscope. They face an enormous burden of defending themselves against questions about both professional ethics and their role in promoting communication efforts based more in business strategy versus fact (Penchansky, 2001).

CURRENT REFORMS

A number of recent attempts have helped answer these ethical questions. The Business Roundtable, an association of 150 CEOs of major U.S. corporations, joined with 12 leading business schools to create a \$3 million institute to teach practical ethics (AFXNews.com, 2004). Related, a white paper by the Public Relations Coalition – 19 U.S. based communication trade groups and a number of other communication organizations – asked business leaders to work toward recovering investor and public trust through better ethical practices (Cordasco, 2003). Last, Tyco International, whose

CEO L. Dennis Kozlowski is on trial for robbing the company of \$600 million, hired a company to train its employees on both ethics and legal compliance (Associated Press, 2003). Still, 72 percent of workers report having received no ethics training in the last 12 months (Slay, 2004).

With the global economy's biggest growth periods still to come, it is essential to restore the world's trust in its corporations and communicators. The ability to capitalize upon this growth may hinge on public relations practitioners' ability to silence critics of their recent ethical activities.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

U.S. PUBLIC RELATIONS HISTORY

Ethical expectations for the global public relations industry and the role of its practitioners have evolved quite a bit since their earliest days. Initial support for creating a formal public relations vocation -- strategic communication that benefits individual economic/issue factions -- surprisingly first came to fruition through U.S. government action. In the late 1700's, James Madison and his fellow Constitutional authors argued that public progress would only occur if a system promoted the existence of a bevy of competing economic and political interests (Olasky, 1987). They viewed this constant competition as a defense against possible domination by an individual entity or organization. Individual interests or passions taken too far, according to these authors, undermine the common good. They saw "public interest" as a natural by-product of private competition.

While their duties were similar, the dominant ideology of public relations practitioners of the 1800s was a sharp contrast to that of the discipline's current practitioners. Extending the Madisonian definition of public interest, most practitioners such as Amos Kendall attempted to restrict government intervention of any kind against their clients. With few exceptions, the public and private sectors remained completely separate entities.

In the latter part of the 1800s, a number of railroad industry executives sought to merge these entities. Realizing the potential economic boon behind a public-private partnership for their industry, they used public relations methods to gain federal support

and protections for their businesses. These efforts resulted in a governmental commission to protect railroad and “public interests.” The long-term effects of this commission, however, were more than what these executives originally bargained for: a railroad industry in chaos.

In the early 20th century, Theodore Vail and Samuel Insull—powerful figures in the telephone and electric utilities industries—borrowed from the public relations approach used by railroad organizations. Vail and Insull employed massive, successful public relations campaigns to garner approval for a regulated monopoly of their respective industries in the name of public interest.

Ivy Lee, credited as being the founding father of modern public relations, introduced a more analytical approach to public relations communication. In creating his campaigns, Lee based his messages on economic theory, combining these with situational ethics derived from psychological and scientific concepts. More importantly, Lee’s campaign methods helped change the reputation of public relations practitioners from salesmen to scientific, strategic communicators. Akin to his predecessors, Ivy Lee promoted ideals of reducing competition under a premise that it advanced public interest. Lee, however, openly opposed large, competitive alliances between organizations and/or the federal government.

If Ivy Lee founded modern public relations, in the 1930’s Edward Bernays arguably helped define it. Bernays argued that society would move toward chaos unless public relations practitioners worked to “manipulate” (in a good way) public opinion into logical, organized patterns. Over the next thirty years, this perspective would ultimately become the modern definition of the role of public relations in society.

Day (2003) extended Bernays' definition of public relations to include two distinct philosophies of the role of the industry's practitioners. The first philosophy categorizes the practitioner, while paid, as a person simply advocating a principle that he/she already believes in. This is no different than expression of an opinion on the grounds of First Amendment freedom of speech protections. The second philosophy sees the public relations representative as a hired conduit for a point of view that he/she may not personally condone. This role similarly operates under a First Amendment premise, but is instead concerned with the person/s *receiving* this opinion. In advocating a particular viewpoint into the marketplace of public opinion, a public relations representative offers the public a chance to hear the message his/her client's message, even a controversial one.

In the latter part of the century, public relations gained acceptance as a crucial part of a company's overall corporate strategy, with practitioners playing a bigger role than ever before in their clients' well-being. The new enemy to these issue advocates was the competition; government intervention safeguarded the consumer from the inevitable centralization of business.

While the definition of "public relations" might have changed over the years, the present and future of the field across the globe will inevitably be shaped in the classroom. University-based practitioners, either through instruction or research, spend a great deal of time conversing with students, fellow scholars, the industry, and to the general public on the industry and its ethics. Their scholarly writings often serve as a benchmark for the field's current state. Likewise, through their instruction, they shape the views of their students: the public relations practitioners of tomorrow.

Not surprisingly, many of these scholars the world over turn toward the U.S. for guidance on the field and industry norms. The planet's oldest public relations system resides in the United States, and its actions and philosophies often shape predecessor systems in countries possessing similar social, business and ethical ideals.

PUBLIC RELATIONS IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Potts described the Australian and New Zealand public relations systems as two of the most active and advanced in the western hemisphere (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 2001). Also, international corruption watchdog *Transparency International* consistently rates the two countries among the least corrupt in the world (Transparency International, 2004). Akin to the United States, however, they too possess their fair share of ethical problems.

In a study on New Zealand business managers' attitudes toward unethical behavior, Brennan, Ennis and Esslemont (1992) uncovered that while these individuals viewed themselves as more ethical than the "average" executive, they would also consider acting unethically. Likewise, Story (1996) discovered that New Zealand managers' tolerance of unethical behavior higher than their American counterparts across lower, middle and senior management levels of the organization. Moreover, for New Zealand's Top 200 companies, at the governance level ethics was not deemed a major corporate objective (Alam, 1993). In a follow-up study six years later, Alam (1999) found that middle and lower managers consistently encountered dilemmas arising out of a disparity between corporate and individual ethical standards.

Brennan, Ennis and Esslemont (1992) reasoned that New Zealand's ethical standards haven't changed, only the nation's awareness levels on the topic. Following the

country's highly publicized, radical economic and social reforms that began in 1984, businesses there have been under a two-decade ethical spotlight. Corporate fraud, creative accounting, insider trading, and the failure to disclose required information in annual reports have received unprecedented attention since the 1984 reform programs were implemented. These reforms, however, might have backfired. Most managers said that ethical standards had actually fallen during the period that coincided with the most active parts of the reform process (Brennan, Ennis & Esslemont, 1992).

The recent Timberlands scandal is perhaps the most infamous of New Zealand's corporate ethical transgressions to date (Hager & Burton, 1999). In the early 1990s, Timberlands – a New Zealand government-owned logging company, hired British public relations firm Shandwick New Zealand to represent the company's interests (Rowell, 1999). Timberlands had been logging in the country's west coast rainforests since 1970 until a 1994 measure stopped the organization from further clear-cutting efforts. The company turned to Shandwick – one of the world's largest public relations firms – to persuade the public to grant Timberlands approval for an expansion of its logging operations.

Shandwick employed aggressive tactics to neutralize Timberlands' environmentalist opposition. They spied on Timberlands critics, infiltrated opposition factions, and scrutinized federal funding of environmental groups. On several occasions, Timberlands even threatened to sue anyone counter to their interests. Perhaps the key component to the Shandwick/Timberlands campaign was to create the impression of widespread, public support for logging (McManus, 2001). Shandwick created a fictitious, pro-logging front group and looked to Timberlands supporters in academia, industry, the

media and parliament to strengthen their position. Financial sponsorship was offered in return for pro-logging support in schools. New Zealand's then Prime Minister Jenny Shipley took a major credibility hit after it was discovered that she had leaked several government documents to the Shandwick/Timberlands team.

Similarly, the Australian business community is no stranger to scandals. Globalization, Aboriginal reconciliation, government communication, intercultural communication and the increased prominence of the non-profit sector all have contributed to a nationwide focus on ethics that mirrors neighboring New Zealand (Singh & Smyth, 2000). For Australia's public relations practitioners, trade-offs are often required between presenting the clients in the best possible light (including protecting their privacy) and telling the full truth (Motion and Leitch, 2000). This challenge, according to Motion and Leitch, often relegates discussion about truth and honesty to a question of "strategic choice rather than a moral imperative." In 2000, John Laws, a morning talk show host at Radio 2UE and one of the country's most listened-to radio programs, was cited for non-disclosure of his acceptance of payoffs from various corporations to promote their interests on the air (Hughes, 2000). Similarly, 2UE's Alan Jones, heard in 1 out of every 4 Australian households, was likewise nabbed for a nearly identical offense.

Most recently, it was National Australia Bank's (NAB) ethical transgressions that became front-page news. Earlier this year, four of NAB's financial traders were cited for covering up losses stemming from a foreign exchange trading scam (BBCa, 2004). The trades – currently under investigation by Australian police and financial regulators – were estimated to be worth up to \$455 million. In March 2004, the Australian Prudential

Regulatory Authority condemned NAB for its lack of internal controls to prevent this scandal from occurring (BBCc, 2004). Internal fallout for National Australia Bank was substantial. Three top managers and five traders were fired. Frank Cicutto, the bank's chairman and CEO, stepped down shortly after the allegations came to light (BBCb, 2004).

Although halfway around the world, the events at Timberlands and National Australia Bank present glaring similarities to the ethical dilemmas that simultaneously plagued the public relations community in the United States. Preventing future public relations ethical mishaps in all three of these countries, however, will be a difficult task.

ETHICAL CODES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

Lacking formalized educational, certification and barrier-of-entry requirements, a global standardization of the field is seen as a near-impossible endeavor, as is the related establishment of mandatory operational procedures and ethical codes. Further, with the vocation's spreading global presence, individual regions holds contrasting views on how to accurately define both "public relations" and appropriate ethical conduct (Kruckeberg, 1993).

Industry-related organizations have attempted to address these problems. The most widely known body of literature on this topic is the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)'s Code of Ethics. The code, first written in December 1950 by the industry's highest profile membership organization, has been continuously revised to match the ever-changing roles of the field's practitioners. This body of literature states a purpose of guiding public relations toward goals of "emphasizing serving the public

interest; avoiding misrepresentations to clients, employers and others; and the continuing development of public relations practitioners” (Fitzpatrick, 2002a, p. 90).

These ethical codes, Huang (2001) suggested, are crucial for public relations to be granted status as bona-fide profession. Despite agreement with this statement by PRSA, its member public relations organizations and industry practitioners, the cold hard truth is that there are simply no means of formal enforcement for the PRSA Code of Ethics. Without punitive measures, code enforcement falls upon the shoulders of individual practitioners who operate using ethical self-standards (Wright, 1993).

The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Code of Ethics, adopted in 1976 and modified in 1985, offers additional ethical guidelines for public relations and related strategic communication disciplines. While this code contains enforcement and sanction methods, they are non-disciplinary. Enforcement is intended only to serve informational and educational purposes (Briggs & Bernal, 1992).

In Australia and New Zealand, the two biggest public relations organizations – the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) and the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) – likewise lack formal enforcement methods for ethical violations. The two bodies’ main function is to provide a place for the exchange of ideas (Howell, 2002). Despite voluntary codes, a certain degree of professionalism is expected. Gordon Coulter from PRIA:

As professional communication practitioners, we are the guardians of ethical behaviour for the organisations we advise. Our challenge is to recognise the ethical path regardless of the issue confronting up and then to use all of our persuasive skills and intellectual power to ensure that that path is taken. We are there to build and protect organisations’ brands, internally and externally, and the best way to safeguard their value is to ensure that sound ethics underpin all decisions made. At the end of the day, we all know ‘truth’ is the single most powerful weapon in communication, and it is our job to

ensure that the organisations we represent use it at all times, not as a last resort (Communication World, 2003, p.10).

The PRIA, founded in 1949, last updated its Code of Ethics in November 2001. While the PRIA requires its members to “adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence,” (PRIA, 2004) in a number of industry studies performed in Australia between 1983 – 1999, ethical issues were not specifically addressed (Singh & Smyth, 2000). (See APPENDIX A for the current PRIA Code of Ethics.)

In New Zealand, Simpson (1999) challenged the notion of objectivity and impartiality of PRINZ ethics committees considering the small size of the country’s public relations industry. As of May 2002, there were fewer than 700 PRINZ members nationwide (PRINZ, 2003). (See APPENDIX B for the current PRINZ Code of Ethics.)

THEORETICAL MODELS/BASES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

While various industry codes of ethics exist, there is no theoretical framework for explaining ethics strictly from a public relations perspective. Several attempts have been made, however, to outline ethical expectations and related decision-making processes for the industry: three types of theoretical bases and models founded in ethical principles. Each of these three types will be discussed individually below.

TYPE 1: MODELS OF DISCOURSE

The first model type stresses public relations’ role in encouraging discourse. Within this type lies a popular theoretical base for public relations, Barney and Black’s (1994) **attorney-adversary** model. Under this model, public relations practitioners perform a persuasive function similar to an attorney representing a client. The attorney-adversary model operates under an assumption that if competing messages and

viewpoints are adequately represented, the truth will inevitably emerge. (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). Similarly, in the court of public opinion serviced by public relations practitioners, there is an expectation that the public will absorb all of the contrasting messages and viewpoints being disseminated. After considering all of this information, the public is expected to form an advised, intelligent opinion.

Along with this expectation is the model's leeway for a public relations practitioner to provide strategic, limited disclosure of information to best serve and/or protect his/her client's interests. Similar to the counterargument in legal settings, this practice is deemed acceptable behavior since alternative views are expected to arise naturally as a counterbalance to a particular perspective. If an opposing viewpoint doesn't emerge on its own, the burden falls upon the journalist or consumer advocate to provide for the public a counterargument that assures this balance.

The **two-way symmetrical model** first proposed by Grunig (1992) structures public relations as a forum for discussion in which a variety of individuals, opinions and values come together, generally arriving at different conclusions. (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2002). This model is derived from the teachings of classical Greek philosopher Isocrates, who viewed unification and consensus as essential components of rhetorical dialogue (Marsh, 2001). One cannot be certain that the best course of action was selected, said Isocrates, unless the interests and arguments of others were first weighed.

TYPE 2: MODELS OF SOCIETAL OBLIGATION

The **social responsibility** model, originally formulated by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) as a normative pattern of press operations, serves as a basis for concepts of civic journalism. This model instructs public relations practitioners to enact their

campaigns while serving a broader public interest and communal good (Baker, 2002). Closely related is the **communitarianism** model (Leeper, 1996; Etzioni, 1993), which extends the social responsibility model to include additional duties of strengthening community and promoting communal values of fairness, democracy, and truth.

Sullivan's (1965) **partisan versus mutual values** model defines public relations as the intersection between these two values. This theoretical base, expanded in 1989 by Pearson, argues that while a public relations representative owes allegiance to his/her client, employer or organization, he/she must acknowledge all--even conflicting--viewpoints. A proper balance between obligation to employer and a "principle of mutuality" to contrasting opinions ensures a responsible strategic communication process (Pearson, 1989).

TYPE 3: MODELS OF THE PROFESSIONAL

Fitzpatrick and Gauthier's (2002) **professional responsibility** model extends the other theoretical models by freeing public relations representatives from assuming social and communitarian responsibilities in their activities. Fitzpatrick and Gauthier characterized these as unrealistic and unattainable expectations. They classified public relations practitioners not under the umbrella of communicators, but rather as serving in a "professional" role, with appropriate responsibilities derived from this alternate form of classification. The four criteria of this classification are: a) membership in a professional organization, b) specialized expertise, c) an orientation toward service, and d) autonomy in operation.

According to Fitzpatrick and Gauthier, professional classification does not necessarily imply complete autonomy from performing responsible advocacy. They

outlined three foundations of advocacy-related requirements for the public relations practitioner as a professional: a) persuasive communication should completely avoid or best minimize harm, b) display respect for people and treat them with appropriate dignity, and c) communicate the “benefits and burdens” of an action or policy in as fair a manner as possible. Similarly, Baker (2002) used Koehn’s (1994) classification of a professional to describe the public relations vocation. A profession, according to Koehn, loses its moral authority if it allows a practitioner to sacrifice the well being of one member of the community in servicing the needs of another. A professional relationship maintains ethics through self-regulation. Unbridled loyalty to a single client and/or viewpoint effectively removes other members of the professional community as potential clients.

Finally, Hutton (1999) proposed that the only model that truly describes public relations is one containing an underlying purpose of **relationship management** (toward a client). This model, according to Hutton, is the only one capable of both defining the discipline while serving as a basis for its operation. Overall, the use of ethical self-standards as an operational framework for public relations is an approach gaining more widespread acceptance.

Baker and Martinson (2001) advanced the use of these theoretical models by placing them in an ethical framework specific to public relations. Their TARES test outlined ethical expectations for the public relations practitioner to consider when enacting a persuasive communication campaign.

THE TARES TEST

The TARES test (Baker & Martinson, 2001) is composed of five interconnected factors of ethical consideration: Truthfulness of the message, Authenticity of the

persuader, Respect for the persuadee, Equity of the appeal, and Social Responsibility for the common good.

Truthfulness states that public relations communication must result in an audience with enough information to make an informed choice on the issue being presented. Authenticity questions the motive of the communication message, requiring public relations practitioners to ask themselves if this message will benefit someone other than their clients. Respect demands that communicators perceive their target audience as “human beings,” and that messages are shaped and transmitted with appropriate respect. Equity calls for a responsibility by public relations practitioners to avoid communication that intentionally takes advantage of the vulnerabilities of a specific audience. Social responsibility, discussed above as a theoretical model and often cited within sister disciplines, is an expectation of service by mass media practitioners toward the public at large.

Lieber (2003) created a quantitative version of the TARES Test by wording its ethical considerations into 14 7-point, Likert scale statements. In a test of U.S. based practitioners, Lieber uncovered that the TARES Test was better suited for a three-factor configuration derived from Day’s (2003) definition of moral knowledge.

Factor 1, “Civility,” represented an attitude of self-sacrifice by the communicator in favor of overall respect for others. The definition of this factor mirrors that of prosocial behavior, specifically behavior powered by intrinsic, prosocial motives for action. This form of prosocial behavior produces a response or action guided by a primary focus on the needs of others and for collective society (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

The second factor, “Integrity,” signified a communicator’s willingness to take responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions and to live with the results of this behavior. A communicator who values matters of Integrity practices what he/she preaches, trying to make a difference in society through their actions (Day, 2003, p. 11).

“Credibility,” Day’s third factor, detailed a communicator’s ability to be believable and worthy of trust. It is a communicator’s transition from simply dealing with others to his/her membership in the moral community at large.

Even the TARES test, however, suffers from a glaring weakness of the public relations industry: it is a vocation guided by amorphous ethical standards. Perhaps the solution to these standards and public relations’ non-enforceable industry codes are in traditional models, ones that can help to provide a much-needed ethical foundation for issue advocates expected to equally serve both public and private interests.

TRADITIONAL ETHICAL MODELS

GOLDEN MEAN MODELS

Arguably the most well known of all traditional models from a public relations context is Aristotle’s **Golden Mean**. The popularity of this model lies in its ability to assist practitioners in ethical decision-making dilemmas stemming from conflicts in duty to self, client and society. The Golden Mean identifies “moral virtue” as the ideal middle ground between absolute indifference versus sheer selfishness when having to make a difficult decision (McKeon, 1947). Aristotle’s Golden Mean suggests aiming for the median between these two aforementioned extremes, as this is ideally the fairest and reasonable course of action to take. Each individual has his/her own mean level, unique for each person as well as the situation that is confronted. Aristotle suggested that if a

person tends to lean toward one extreme, he/she should deliberately attempt to balance this bias by leaning in the other direction when making decisions. Only persons with a regulative ideal toward this virtuous mindset were capable of selecting a Golden Mean outcome (Oakley & Cocking, 2001). Also, proper deliberation must take place before any Golden Mean decision is reached (Leslie, 2000; Solomon & Greene, 1999).

Confucius likewise proposed a decision-making model based of selecting a mean, founded in a concept of “virtue” (Bonevac, Boone & Phillips, 1992). Virtue, according to Confucius, was strictly dependent on individual character, and could not be augmented through social standing or lineage. Oakley & Cocking (2001) defined a virtuous person as one who: a) performs certain activities, b) acts from certain (virtuous) motives that c) proceed from a certain character structure. There are two distinct definitions of character within the virtue ethicist camp. The first definition determines character according to an Aristotelian view of that which we require to lead us toward eudemonia, or human flourishing. The second is one held by perfectionists, that virtuous actions are activities that fully develop our essential properties as human beings.

Foot extended the first definition to include virtues that benefit the collective. McIntyre mirrored Foot in the importance of community to virtuosity. He perceived actions that strengthen traditions and the societies in which they reside as equally virtuous (Oakley & Cocking, 2001).

In public relations, practitioners can apply these Golden Mean models to compensate for a misbalance in service to either private or public interests. For example, by considering a Golden Mean solution, a strategic communicator avoids over-servicing client at the expense of the collective, or vice-versa. Further, the Golden Mean model can

assist in matters of ethics concerning partial truth telling. If Confucian “virtue” is truly taken into account, external interests should be a non-factor when determining when to withhold information from the public. This would ideally result in a use of this practice that remains strategic but fair to all parties involved.

DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS

Immanuel Kant extended the golden rule models by requiring a **Categorical Imperative** (Kant, 1964) to decisions that are made. A Categorical Imperative approach is one based on deontological ethics, originating from Greek concepts of *deon*, or duty to society. This duty, according to Kant, must be upheld at all times, even when in conflict with socially accepted standards. Deontologists outwardly reject consequence in favor of universal maxims. Right, according to deontologists, not only fails to precede the good, it is not concerned with it at all (Davis, 1993). Even when tragic consequence might result, deontologists hold preservation of personal virtue of utmost importance.

Kant challenged decision-makers to question whether they would want their desired course of action applied categorically—unconditionally, without exceptions of any kind—to all. Kant believed that higher truths of moral law exist within a person’s conscience, an area external from the standard, physical universe. Lying of any kind—even for a good reason—is considered wrong and a violation of conscience. Failure to adhere to moral laws, according to Kant, would result in a chaos-filled society, as promises would no longer have meaning.

Applying a categorical, deontological ethical approach to public relations, however, would raise serious questions about the ethics of selective truth telling. Even though this practice is technically not lying, it borders on violations to moral law since

partial truth telling could truly never be applied unconditionally. Also, weighing the consequences of each application individually, in some instances selective truth telling would be categorically inappropriate, and its use a complete abuse of public trust. For instance, a carefully worded, overly specific categorical imperative can justify even the most unethical of public relations actions. Further, in these situations, by selectively withholding information from the public, practitioners would be in violation of their *deon*, or duty to the society they serve.

UTILITARIANISM

John Stuart Mill, akin to Kant, viewed ethics from a duty perspective. Mill, however, saw virtue in action in accordance to duty, not simply for the sake of it (Solomon & Greene, 1999). To Mill, problem solving was a matter of assessing the “utility” of an individual decision, such that it provided the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Mill’s **Utilitarianism** (Mill, 1861) instructed decision makers to select a course of action most likely to minimize harm while maximizing good. To select an alternative course, according to Mill, was an unethical action.

Jeremy Bentham offered a quantifiable method of determining the utility of an action. His “happiness calculus” measured the amount of pleasure and pain that resulted from an action by its degree of goodness or badness, or *sommum bonum* (Solomon & Greene, 1999). *Sommum bonum* was the ultimate good, a single principle toward which all actions should be aimed. Hutchison (1999) elaborated upon Bentham’s happiness calculus and cautioned against individual good actions that might cause bad consequences if performed by many. For this reason, Hutchison argued, certain laws exist that prohibit actions in general.

There are two kinds of utility: act and rule utilitarianism. The former requires that one ask whether a particular action adheres to utilitarian philosophies, the latter the same but related specifically to the construction of moral rules.

Applying act utilitarianism to public relations, the best decision by a practitioner -- including when to selectively withhold information -- would be one that benefited both client and public. Related, rule utilitarianism could be employed if formal enforcement measures were implemented into both the PRSA and IABC Codes of Ethics, touting these same utilitarianistic principles.

Analyzing this concept a little further, Day's (2003) second philosophy on the role of the public relations practitioners is a wonderful extension of the utilitarian model. As issue advocates, practitioners provide a much-needed utility of granting the public an opportunity to hear the message of his/her client, even one that is controversial. Often times public relations is the only way for these individuals and/or organizations to have a voice.

VEIL OF IGNORANCE

The only way to truly make what can be considered an ethical decision, according to John Rawls (1971), is to remove any and all forms of social differentiations from the decision-making process. Rawls proposed the establishment of a “**Veil of Ignorance**,” in which individual features of race, class, gender, group interests, etc., are removed from the equation: every person is considered an equal part of society in both power and justice. Through this “justice as fairness” approach, rational individuals can make decisions that then benefit all of society (Rawls, 1971). Decisions should be based on this assumed equality, with a desired outcome of protecting the most vulnerable while

minimizing risks. Further, unequal distribution of resources is permissible, but only when it benefits society's most disadvantaged.

The Veil of Ignorance draws its roots from the straightforward biblical premise of **loving your neighbor** as you would yourself, with decisions made accordingly (Augustine, 1943). Christian tradition extended this concept of love to include "agape." Much like the Veil's removal of social differentiation, agape is an unconditional, unselfish love for a person regardless of whom they are or what they're like (Outka, 1972).

Echoing the application of Confucian virtue to public relations, the Veil of Ignorance and the biblical premise of love both serve as potential buffers for practitioners against unwanted social and economic influence from external variables. These buffers ideally allow these practitioners the freedom to perform their advocacy and to selectively withhold information only when such decisions would serve all of society. Moreover, by applying the Veil to client selection, public relations practitioners can assume an active role in providing a voice for the powerless and/or disadvantaged in society. Achieving this voice is a crucial step toward the Veil of Ignorance's goal of promoting a justice as fairness environment (Rawls, 1971).

ETHICAL RELATIVISM

Some scholars argue that there are simply no universal moral or ethical principles. They believed in **ethical relativism** -- that different peoples and societies hold different irreconcilable moral beliefs (Blocker, 1986). The ethical relativist abides by the diversity thesis, that different moral standards are permissible for different individuals and different societies (Pojman, 1999).

With different moral standards arise contrasting definitions of what is considered morally right (Blocker, 1986) This dependency thesis states that moral definitions are determined by the society in which they occur (Pojman, 1999). Stace argues that for behavior to truly be considered morally right it must clearly be identified as such by a given society (Blocker, 1986).

There are different variations of ethical relativism. Subjective ethical relativism or subjectivism sees morality in the eyes of the beholder. Conventional ethical relativism or conventionalism indicates that proper moral principles are justified on the basis of their cultural acceptance (Pojman, 1999).

USING MORAL DEVELOPMENT TO EXPLAIN ETHICS

Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), however, completely dismissed ethical relativism and argued for a theory of moral development based on universal moral standards. Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1965) first investigated this theory when observing play patterns of young boys engaged in the game of marbles. In these patterns Piaget discovered evidence of moral growth; a learned ability to reason rooted within individualized moral principles. These patterns became evident when Piaget discovered the boys' actions were performed not on the basis of external reward or possible sanction, but rather, universally, for individual benefit. Erikson (1964) extended Piaget's findings by studying moral growth across the entire life cycle. Kohlberg, a Harvard psychologist, applied Piaget's work in researching the moral development of the university's undergraduates. Kohlberg's explanation of moral development is the most widely used definition of the concept.

Kohlberg (1969) discovered six stages of moral development among his sampled Harvard undergraduates. These stages were divided into three primary levels, consisting of two stages apiece. The first level, which Kohlberg labeled “preconventional,” represents thought processes specifically related to one’s own welfare. A preconventional mind adheres to rules and obeys authority strictly because of punishment or reward. This punishment-reward dichotomy determines standards of what is ultimately perceived as either “right” or “wrong.”

The second level, the “conventional,” defines morality as conforming to the expectations of a given society. Unlike the preconventional level, rules and authority are accepted under a notion of “doing one’s duty,” in performing actions that benefit all of society. Maintenance of social order is considered the highest priority in this level.

“Postconventional,” the third and highest level of Kohlberg’s six stages, classifies universal, shared principles as what ultimately guides moral reasoning. Standards of morality are defined by acting in accordance with communal, societal standards. These standards are inherent by nature, based on personal conscience guided by thought and judgment.

Gilligan (1982) criticized Kohlberg’s research as being biased against women and argued that his findings did not allow for differing developmental patterns based on gender. Women, she stated, develop in an environment where more emphasis is placed on caring for others. Rousseau proposed that ethical disparities between genders help provide a positive balance between them; activity considered virtuous for men was deemed undesirable for women, and vice-versa (Grimshaw, 491). In response to

Gilligan's assertions, Kohlberg expanded his concepts of moral development. The postconventional stage was re-conceptualized to include an ethic of care.

Minnesota psychologist James Rest (1983, 1979) furthered Kohlberg's work in two significant areas. First, he applied the concept of ethical development to the professional arena. Furthermore, until that point, research on this topic had been strictly qualitative, with data obtained through comprehensive, personal interviews. Consequently, Rest's second major contribution was his development of a paper-and-pencil test that became the first quantitative means of testing Kohlberg and Gilligan's research.

Rest's "Defining Issues Test" presents six ethical dilemmas accompanied by twelve ranked statements. Respondents are instructed to answer these statements according to each one's perceived levels of importance in helping reach an ethical decision about the presented dilemma. The score obtained from these rankings, a P index, is considered a reflection of moral development.

To date, there has been only one testing of the public relations industry via the Defining Issues Test (DIT), exploratory research that lacked sufficient postconventional statements to be considered a true ethical baseline for the vocation (Lieber, 2003). Journalists, however, have been surveyed three times (Westbrook, 1995; Coleman, 2003; Coleman & Wilkins, 2002). This is an important observation and correlation since a vast majority of the public relations community are, in fact, trained in and/or veterans of other mass communications-related fields (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2003).

Ryan and Martinson (1994) offered additional support for comparing the two industries on topics of ethics. In surveying public relations practitioners and journalists

via ethics-based scenarios, a strong similarity emerged between the two disciplines in answers to questions associated with lying. Both groups perceived a “no comment” response to a request for elaboration on press releases as ethical behavior. Both said an evasive answer was not permissible.

The DIT studies on journalism uncovered a moral development score for journalists higher than all but three other professions: seminarians/philosophers, physicians and medical students. These three groups shared a common bond of greater mean education levels than their journalistic counterparts, an important distinction since educational attainment had proven to be one of the soundest predictors of moral development (Rest, 1986). Professions scoring below journalists included dental students, nurses, veterinary students, naval officers, orthopedic surgeons, prison inmates and graduate/undergraduate college students. (See **Table 1.**)

TABLE 1: Mean P Scores for Various Professionals

| <i>Group Tested</i> | <i>Mean P Score on the DIT</i> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Seminarians/Philosophers | 65.1 |
| Medical Students | 50.2 |
| Practicing Physicians | 49.2 |
| Journalists | 48.4 |
| Dental Students | 47.6 |
| Nurses | 46.3 |
| Graduate Students | 44.9 |
| Undergraduate College Students | 43.2 |
| Veterinary Students | 42.2 |
| Navy Enlisted Men | 41.6 |
| Orthopedic Surgeons | 41 |
| Adults in General | 40 |
| MEAN | 39 (s.d.=14.84) |
| High School Students | 31 |
| Prison Inmates | 23.7 |
| Junior High Students | 20 |

Data supplied by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development, Minneapolis, MN.

Seeing journalists as astute moral reasoners is a view not necessarily shared by the general populace. Voakes uncovered a public with “starkly different conceptions of journalistic ethics” (Voakes, 1997, p. 23) than actual journalists. Likewise, public relations representatives were “targeted perhaps more than any others for allegedly unethical conduct” (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995, p. 2).

As mentioned, a notable disparity was uncovered between what the public and journalists identified as key influences behind journalistic ethical decision-making. This is a distinction worth mentioning since former journalists currently staff a large portion of the public relations vocation (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2003). Journalists perceived internal factors related to operational ethics -- laws and organizational policies -- as most significant in their ethical decision-making. The public highlighted external factors associated with situational ethics, such as competition from other media outlets and standard, journalistic norms, as primary influences on journalistic ethics.

Research on journalistic ethical reasoning consistently found support for the public’s view (Valenti, 1998; Voakes, 1997; Wulfmeyer, 1990; Anderson, 1987). It discovered that external influences were most significant to journalistic ethical decision-making including: industry competition, accepted professional values and industry norms, and subjects and sources used by news, advertisers, and the audience (Breed, 1955; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Voakes, 1997; Singletary et al., 1990; White & Singletary, 1993; White & Pearce, 1991).

As a whole, quantitative research performed on journalism ethics is mainly descriptive, using statistical techniques to create categories into which journalistic ethical reasoning strategies can be grouped (Singletary et al., 1990; Black, Barney & Van

Tubergen, 1979; Whitlow & Van Tubergen, 1978). Qualitative research on this subject is much more abundant, appearing as philosophical essays and detailed analyses of specific ethical situations.

Likewise, nearly all prior research on public relations ethics focused on defining qualitative, operational guidelines for the field. These are the theoretical bases and models discussed above. The use of bases and models is not surprising for a trio of reasons: a) the relative newness of the field (in comparison to other mass communication disciplines), b) its constant evolution – for example, its recent global push, and c) because of this relative newness, most public relations practitioners are veterans of related, mass communication disciplines – most notably, journalism (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2003). Thus, gauging the attitudes of individuals from these sister disciplines provided ethical data arguably transferable to public relations.

PREDICTING MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite a public relations environment staffed by veterans of sister professions, there is, in fact, a way to gauge ethics from a purely public relations standpoint: by researching its senior level practitioners. These experienced individuals are the true ethical decision-makers within public relations, most heavily socialized into the norms of the vocation. More apt to possess a broader industry perspective, senior level practitioners arguably have the most at stake professionally when confronted with an ethical dilemma.

Research on industry ethics based solely on rank is common within other disciplines, notably in accounting and auditing (Ponemon, 1990; Rest, 1994). While auditing work is admittedly more quantifiable than public relations activities, they share

commonalities in ethical expectations. Auditors are paid by a client for their services, yet must perform their duties in a non-biased fashion. When facing this role conflict, junior and senior-level CPAs tended to acknowledge adherence to rules of ethical conduct as their highest priority. Managers and partners, more concerned with profit and legal matters, viewed these latter items as primary concerns. Accompanying these findings is a related discovery that moral judgment levels in accounting and auditing increased from staff to supervisory levels but sharply declined upon reaching the manager and partner ranks.

Closely related to rank, the variable of job setting is extremely relevant in explaining ethical decision-making processes for public relations practitioners. In agency, corporate and government/public affairs settings, the highest ranked figures often make the crucial decisions on public relations ethical dilemmas. Solo practitioners/consultants, unless working in tandem with another individual on a project, will make these decisions 100 percent of the time. Public relations-focused academics, although performing research and instruction on ethics, simply do not experience industry-related ethical dilemmas.

In the various studies on journalistic ethical decision-making, certain variables were identified as helping predict this population's moral development. The four most significant were motivations, age, education and gender. Other variables, shown to be important predictors of moral development in other professions, are mentioned below to make comparisons between professions. These comparisons are essential as this is the first cross-cultural instance of public relations being tested via the DIT.

To begin, Singletary and others (Singletary, Caudill, Caudill & White 1990; White & Pearce 1991, White and Singletary 1993) developed, and then validated, an Ethical Motivation Scale in line with Kohlberg's six stages of moral development. Factors for this scale were classified as intrinsic or extrinsic depending on the role outside entities played in determining ethical behavior. White and Pearce (1991) uncovered that journalists who favored intrinsic motivations held more predictable attitudes toward ethical dilemmas than did those who preferred extrinsic guides.

Next, the demographic variables of age, gender, religious preference and education need to be considered as important factors that influence ethical decision-making. According to Rest (1986, 1993), age and education are the principal variables in determining moral development. Longitudinal DIT studies uncovered significant changes in scoring from high school age into adulthood (White, Bushnell & Regnemer, 1978; Rest, 1983), with a leveling off as formal education stops (Rest, 1976b).

Gender, while studied extensively with the DIT, has produced controversial results. A consistent criticism of Kohlberg's work is the aforementioned perceived inherent bias against women (Gilligan, 1982). A comprehensive review of all DIT studies, however, found no difference between genders in more than 90% of those tested (Rest, 1979a). When differences did arise, educational opportunities, not gender, served as a better explanation for these differences (Rest, 1983). On the flipside, other studies did in fact uncover a difference in scoring by gender, with women consistently scoring higher than men (Thoma, 1986).

The variable of religion yielded a positive correlation with moral development, but only under certain circumstances. In numerous studies, a more fundamental or

conservative religious belief correlated with lower moral development scores (Rest, 1979a, 1983, 1986; Lawrence, 1978; Parker, 1980). A variety of hypotheses have been offered to explain this variation. Some scholars believe that a higher ethical orientation is a result of critical and evaluative reasoning abilities, a concept that may stand in opposition to fundamental religious beliefs (Parker, 1990). Glock and Stark (1996) noted that orthodox Christian beliefs are highly correlated with social intolerance. Similarly, Ellis (1986) discovered that religious fervor tends to lead to an extreme disregard for the rights of others.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT ACROSS CULTURES

As alluded to earlier, Kohlberg discounted the notion of moral reasoning as culturally relative, and denounced claims of ethical relativism (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). A moral person, he said, is one who can locate just solutions to moral dilemmas. These ideal solutions were independent of gender, religion, role taking, and community-specific moral values (Gielen & Markoulis, 1994). Therefore, moral autonomy and recognition of moral principles should exist in both collectivist (Lei, 1994) and individualistic societies (Gielen, 1990).

The multitude of cross-cultural studies using the DIT seems to confirm Kohlberg's arguments. Snarey and Keljo (1991) reviewed 54 of these studies and discovered that: a) stages 1 to 4 were found virtually everywhere, b) little stage 5 or 6 anywhere, and c) increased levels of education and living in a cosmopolitan city were positively correlated with higher stage 4 scores. Detailed explanation of individual stages will be discussed below. Moon's (1985) analysis of 20 cross-cultural DIT studies yielded trends independent of geographical location. In both Western and Eastern countries, age

and education were significantly correlated with DIT scoring, and postconventional thinking was exhibited in all cultures studied. Gielen and Markoulis (1994) uncovered similar age, education and postconventional trends in the 14 countries they researched. Only in the Arab world did the DIT fail to adequately measure moral reasoning (Gielen, Ahmed & Avellani, 1992).

Dickinson and Gabriel (1982) conducted the only DIT study ever performed on Australia. They located a level of moral development among Australian high school students almost identical to their counterparts in the United States. Further, nearly 80 percent of the variability in students' moral development was accounted for by their parents' reasoning strategies. Parents and their children scored nearly alike in their levels of moral development. To date there has been no reported DIT testing of individuals in New Zealand.

There are two primary benefits of these cross-cultural research projects (Ho & Wu, 2001). First, they uncover systematic relationships between behavioral and ethnic-cultural variables. Second, they allow for generalizations to be made about psychological principles. Cross-cultural researchers typically use three analytic concepts to help describe their work: emics, etics, and theotics. Emics are culture specific concepts, applicable in one particular culture alone; no research claim is made about their applicability elsewhere. In contrast, an etic approach looks for culture universals applicable to 1+ cultures. Etics that are assumed but not yet demonstrated are known as imposed etics (Berry, 1969) or pseudoetics (Triandis, Malpass & Davidson, 1972). Theotics, the highest level of cross-cultural analysis, are theoretical concepts that interpret and account for both emic variation and etic constants (Berry, 1980).

This research employed both emic and etic approaches. First, Australia and New Zealand were analyzed as separate, individual emic entities. Results were compared between them, followed by a second analysis of data obtained from a previous study on U.S. practitioners (Lieber, 2003). Finally, an etic approach combined information from all three countries into a singular dataset. This combined dataset was analyzed for potential universalities across cultures.

The Australian and New Zealand public relations populations were appropriate for emic and etic research approaches for several reasons. First, Australian and New Zealand public relations norms closely resemble those of the United States – the only other population previously researched about this topic and using this methodology (Lieber, 2003). Second, Australia and New Zealand are both democratic countries powered by capitalist economies, variables that once again mirror the tested, U.S. population. Last and perhaps most importantly, in all three of these countries English is the primary language spoken. This allows for the survey instruments to be implemented verbatim, free of any form of language translation. Translation could easily alter meanings of terms, and with it respondents' answers. When the key variables of analysis are abstract concepts such as moral development and ethical reasoning, even the slightest bit of language translation might produce noticeable measurement error.

RECENT RESEARCH

In a recent study, Lieber (2003) analyzed the ethical decision-making patterns of United States-based public relations practitioners. This study employed online versions of the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and a quantitative version of the TARES Test of ethical considerations for public relations to gather data on the ethics of 73 of America's public

relations practitioners. The former is an instrument based on Kohlberg's (1969) moral development theory, the latter self-enforced, ethical consideration statements derived from the research of Baker and Martinson (2001). Both of these instruments will be discussed in greater detail below.

Practitioners originated from all across the United States, with nearly 2/3rds of this convenience sample being female. Age ranged from 22-67, with the average respondent 42 years of age. Nearly half of those sampled attained a graduate degree, approximately the same amount undergraduate educated. Only 3% of these respondents failed to complete college.

Further, approximately 1/3rd of sampled U.S. practitioners served in a corporate public relations role, the same in academia. Twenty percent resided in agency environments, the rest either held public affairs/government positions or operated as solo practitioners. Forty percent of all practitioners surveyed – regardless of job setting -- possessed a professional, journalism background.

Finally, this was an experienced respondent pool, with 75% of respondents reporting 6+ years of public relations job tenure. Last, more than half of those sampled were of managerial status.

Results showed that levels of moral development for this population differed based on job setting, and that age, education, gender and rank significantly affected levels of ethical consideration. The TARES test, it was discovered, was better suited for a three-factor configuration based on Day's (2003) definition of moral knowledge. These factors are Civility, Integrity and Credibility.

While this study yielded some useful exploratory data, it is important to note it was both the first application of the DIT to the public relations vocation as well as the initial attempt to quantify the TARES Test. Thus, more research is sorely needed on this topic before sweeping research generalizations can be made. This study attempted to move toward this goal via a cross-cultural analysis of the ethical patterns of Australian and New Zealand public relations practitioners.

MOTIVES FOR RESEARCH

Motives for this study were numerous. First, this research provided a much needed, cross-cultural look at the ethics of public relations practitioners and their moral development in two of the most active and advanced communication systems in the western world (Potts, 2001). Second, it lends itself to comparisons with the original study on U.S. practitioners, essential if any form of early generalizations about the global public relations vocation can be made. As with the U.S. study, the Australia/New Zealand research included rank (manager vs. non-manager) and job setting (agency vs. corporate vs. government/public affairs vs. solo practitioner/consultant vs. academic) as essential variables for analysis.

Moreover, this research provided the first cross-cultural application of the five-category TARES test of ethical consideration to its intended audience: public relations practitioners. This was the first extra-U.S., quantitative application of the TARES test. Underlying patterns in responses to ethical consideration statements were compared with both the original five-factor configuration of the TARES test and the three factors yielded from the U.S. study.

The potential benefits of this research are tremendous. It provided an opportunity to make multinational comparisons on an under-researched population while simultaneously yielding valuable insight into two critical psychological aspects of their jobs: ethical decision-making and moral development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

RQ1a: What is the mean level of moral development among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ1b: What are the factors that best identify ethical consideration patterns of public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ1c: How do the findings in RQ1a and RQ1b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

RQ2a: Are variables identified as significantly correlated with moral development in other fields significant predictors for public relations in Australia and New Zealand?

RQ2b: What variables are significantly correlated with ethical consideration factors?

RQ2c: How do the findings in RQ2a and RQ2b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

RQ3a: Are there significant associations in moral development between public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on rank or authority (manager vs. non-manager)?

RQ3b: Are there significant associations in ethical consideration factors among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on rank or authority (manager vs. non-manager)?

RQ3c: How do the findings in RQ3a and RQ3b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

RQ4a: Are there differences in moral development among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on job setting (agency vs. corporate vs. solo practitioner/consultant vs. government/public affairs vs. academia)?

RQ4b: Are there differences in ethical consideration factors among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on job setting (agency vs. corporate vs. solo practitioner/consultant vs. government/public affairs vs. non-profit vs. academia)?

RQ4c: How do the findings in RQ4a and RQ4b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

Given the lack of research in this area and the exploratory, cross-cultural nature of this study, no specific or directional hypotheses were made about the expected outcome of the research questions. Thus, while the study's emic approaches assumed uniqueness among countries because of geographic, cultural, economic, ethnic and demographic differences, it did not, however, argue for etic practitioner universalities based solely on membership within the public relations community.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

STUDY 1: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN/NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

To gain a better understanding of the nuances and unique challenges of the public relations landscape of Australia and New Zealand, 11 qualitative interviews were conducted on a convenience sample of its practitioners. Each of these telephone/in-person interviews was approximately 15-30 minutes in length. Practitioners were asked general questions about public relations in that region and also to recall specific ethical dilemmas and/or challenges they faced over the past year (See **Index 1**). Also, they were requested to provide information on the factors that led to their ultimate decision on these dilemmas and/or challenges.

INDEX 1: Qualitative Interview Outline

1. In the past work year, can you recall a situation or two when you were faced with a very difficult decision? (By “very difficult decision,” I mean an ethical dilemma of sorts, something that required you to seriously ponder the action before undertaking it.)
2. Thinking back to this situation/s, what did you ultimately decide to do?
3. What factors ultimately led to your decision?
4. Would your decision have changed if it were made today?
5. If so, why?

The results of these interviews served two valuable purposes. First, they yielded critical, firsthand data on the ethics of Australia and New Zealand-based practitioners.

Second, this information was incorporated into the customized, final two dilemmas of this research's second study, the Defining Issues Test.

STUDY 2: THE DEFINING ISSUES AND TARES TESTS

Following the qualitative interviews, members of public relations communities of Australia and New Zealand were tested via James Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT) and a 14-question, quantitative version of Baker and Martinson's TARES Test.

The use of a convenience sample is commonplace in DIT studies. This form of subject acquisition was appropriate since this study adhered to three necessary conditions justifying its usage (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). First, that the material being studied—ethical development—was difficult to obtain because of a potential pro-social response effect. Second, the nuances of online surveying combined with the limited resources available for data collection hindered the ability to generate a truly random sample. The public relations communities of both Australia and New Zealand are small in number. Thus, by surveying a large enough convenience sample, these communities ideally should have been well represented. Third, while moral development and ethical development are important topics for the public relations sector, this was surprisingly the first cross-cultural application of the DIT and TARES tests for the public relations industry.

The DIT, originally created in 1979, has proven its worth on many occasions as a reliable measurement device of moral development across a variety of professions. Over 400 published studies use the Defining Issues Test (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). Prior to the current study, no cross-cultural testing of the public relations vocation has been conducted via the DIT.

The DIT presents six ethical dilemmas accompanied by twelve statements. Four of the dilemmas in this study originate from the original DIT and are included in all versions of the test. The DIT allows for the inclusion of two additional dilemmas; in this instance they were based on the results of the aforementioned qualitative interviews.

While the test provides leeway to include these additional dilemmas, they are required to theoretically mirror the four “baseline” dilemmas in design. First, the added dilemmas should be true “dilemmas,” in that there is no “right” or “wrong” course of action. Both of the new dilemmas were to be pre-tested for comprehension. Second, the twelve individually ranked statements must reflect the moral development stages suggested by Kohlberg, with at least 3 or 4 of these statements, per dilemma, based on the “highest order” stages of 5 and six. These stages represent the following, from lowest to highest:

- a) Stage 2—considerations focusing directly on potential advantages to the actor him/herself, and on the basic premise of fairness associated with exchange of favors,
- b) Stage 3-considerations focusing on the good or evil intentions of those involved as well as the importance of maintaining positive relationships, friendships and approval within them,
- c) Stage 4-considerations focusing on the maintenance of the existing legal system, roles, and formal organizational structure,
- d) Stage 5A-considerations focusing on the organization of society via appeal to consensus-producing procedures (abiding by majority vote), insisting on “due process,” as well as protecting minimal, basic rights,

- e) Stage 5B/6-considerations focusing on the structure of social arrangements and relationships based on universally appealing concepts.

Respondents are instructed to rank the twelve statements according to each one's perceived level of importance in helping reach a decision about the presented dilemma. The statements were ranked on a 5-point scale of "Great," "Much," "Little," "Some" and "None."

The score obtained from these rankings, a P-index, is considered a reflection of moral development, specifically, the relative importance an individual assigns to decisions rooted in these principles. The levels serve as a manifestation of the postconventional: Kohlberg's highest stage of moral development. In a mega, combined sample of 45,856 DIT's taken between 1989-1993, the mean P-index score was 39.1 (*s.d.*=14.84), with data approximately normally distributed ranging from 0 to 91 (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 1999).

To assure validity in ranking, the DIT includes a consistency check between rating and ranking to defend against random responses by the test's participants. There is an expectation that the four rating statements indicated as "most important" through "fourth most important" will be mirrored by statement rankings as having a "Great," "Much" or "Some" impact on the dilemma decision. If a pattern of inconsistency emerges between these two across multiple dilemmas, offending subjects are removed. Additionally, the test contains a number of "meaningless" questions, intended to sound impressive in presentation but holding no actual purpose. If a respondent selects answers simply based on assumed complexity versus actual meaning, the individual questionnaire is discarded. Internal reliability for the DIT in general is high, with both a Cronbach's

alpha score (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 1999) and test re-test reliability (Rest, 1993) in the upper .70s to low .80s.

The TARES Test

The dilemmas were followed by fourteen questions on ethical consideration, derived from the five-level TARES (Truthfulness, Authenticity, Respect, Equity and Social Responsibility) test. There were three questions per level with the exception of Respect, which contained two. These questions, in the form of 7-point Likert scales from “Not at all important” to “Very important,” measured the amount of ethical consideration a public relations practitioner places on these items when facing a difficult communication decision. (These questions comprise **Index 2**.)

INDEX 2: Ethical Consideration Questions Derived from the TARES Test

***TRUTHFULNESS (of the message)**

1. The accuracy of the content.
2. Whether the communicator’s own honesty and integrity may be questioned as a result of this communication decision.
3. Whether the communicator would feel deceived if this communication was related to him/her in the same context.

***AUTHENTICITY (of the persuader)**

1. That the communicator would personally advocate the view he/she is presenting.
2. People receiving the information will benefit from it.
3. That the communicator would openly assume personal responsibility for the communication.

(Index 2 Continued)

***RESPECT (for the persuadee)**

1. That the target audience is viewed by the communicator with respect.
2. Self-interest is being promoted at the expense of those being persuaded.

***EQUITY (of the appeal)**

1. Whether the target audience was unfairly selected due to their vulnerability to the content.
2. The context of the communication is fair.
3. The target audience can completely understand the information being presented to them.

***SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (for the common good)**

1. The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society.
2. That the content of the communication promoted the principles the communicator personally believes in.
3. Certain groups might be unfairly stereotyped by this communication.

Lieber (2003) tested this quantitative version of the TARES Test on U.S. practitioners. For this specific population he uncovered it was better suited for a three, versus five, factor configuration derived from Day's (2003) definition of moral knowledge. These factors of Civility, Integrity and Credibility improved internal factor consistency to .82, .77 and .66., respectively.

Completing the study were questions pertaining to each individual's: a) location, b) public relations job setting and title, c) managerial status, d) public relations job tenure, e) pre-public relations employment, f) education, g) age, h) gender, i) ethnicity, j) political ideology and k) religious ideology.

PROCEDURE

STUDY 1: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN/NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

Qualitative data were acquired via eleven, semi-structured, telephone/in-person interviews between 15-30 minutes in length. Of these 11, five (4 male, 1 female) resided in Australia, the remaining 6 (4 male, 2 female) in New Zealand. Three worked in an agency setting (2 Australia, 1 New Zealand), 3 for corporations (1 Australia, 2 New Zealand), 3 in a public affairs/government environ (1 Australia, 2 New Zealand), 1 in academia (New Zealand), and finally 1 as a solo practitioner (Australia). In the interest of anonymity, practitioners were identified only by the order of interview (e.g. PR5).

To analyze the data, this study employed O'Dwyer's (2004) 3-phase methodology of qualitative analysis. The first phase, data reduction, consisted of 3 separate steps. In step 1, all data associated with the interviews (journal/diary reflections, interview notes, transcripts, contextual and background information, etc.) were assembled. Key themes were recorded in step 2, and finally significant patterns within the data were noted (step three). The second phase, data display, involved the creation of a visual representation of these themes and/or patterns in the form of detailed matrices.

Phase three, the 5-step data interpretation phase – as its name alludes to – was the actual interpretation portion of the qualitative analysis. In step 1, matrices and all collected data were revisited. Step 2 involved the identification of an overarching, big picture within the data. In step 3, a thick description of big picture findings was written, accompanied by the extrapolation of key quotes from interviewed respondents. Step 4 contextualized the thick descriptions from the previous step. Last, an analytical lens was

applied in the form of short story, narrative format (step 5). From this final step emerged the following qualitative results.

STUDY 2: THE DEFINING ISSUES AND TARES TESTS

Powered by information obtained from the earlier qualitative interviews, a quantitative testing of both the Defining Issues and TARES tests shortly followed thereafter. Responses from the 11 interviewed practitioners were combined with recent historical events in Australia and New Zealand's public relations spheres to create the final two Defining Issues Tests dilemmas. These two dilemmas (**Appendix C**), identified as "Client" and "Whistleblower," mirrored ethical challenges identified by interviewees as prominent ones and likewise were intentionally reminiscent of the aforementioned National Australia Bank and Timberlands scandals. This methodology ensured relevancy of these two created dilemmas for this particular population. Finally, moral development stage assignment for these new dilemmas was independently confirmed to ensure instrument validity in line with Rest's (1983, 1979) scoring procedures for the Defining Issues Test.

The target convenience sample for this second study were public relations practitioners across Australia and New Zealand, with responses obtained from 101 individuals. (Justification for the use of a convenience sample when gathering quantitative data is, once again, discussed in greater detail above.) While this number may appear small, most studies containing the DIT employed a similar, relatively small subject pool of 50-100 respondents.

Subjects were solicited either via personal, direct email solicitation, organization-wide solicitation, email listserv distribution or through “viral marketing” – word-of-mouth referrals – by already solicited individuals.

Direct email solicited participants consisted of public relations practitioners across Australia and New Zealand as well as faculty at academic institutions there specializing in public relations research and/or instruction. Two waves of email messages – the second a reminder message encouraging participation – were sent to these individuals.

Organizational solicitation occurred to members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), and local chapters of International Association of Business Communicators (IABC).

Email listserv distribution was sent to members of the Account Planning Group of strategic communication planners across Australia as well as via the “PR Influences,” monthly e-mail based newsletter. “PR Influences,” located at <http://www.prinfluences.com.au>, is an online forum for Australia’s marketing and corporate communication professionals.

Response rate for this study was difficult to discern based on the inability to truly track email distribution through organizational solicitation and email listserv distribution. Membership lists for these latter two methods are not only updated by the minute as members subscribe and unsubscribe, they are also confidential. Additionally, many current email programs filter out “group” email such as these as “junk mail,” eliminating the message before it ever has a chance to reach a target respondent’s email inbox.

The study was placed online in hopes of securing a higher response rate and to minimize costs. Considerable success was achieved with the study on U.S. public relations practitioners via this method. As a whole, they indicated an overwhelming preference toward an online versus printed format. Completion rates verified this online preference. Seventy-five percent of respondents who began the U.S. study ended up completing it. Moreover, the Internet is increasingly becoming the preferred method of communication for public relations practitioners (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 2001). A whopping 98 percent of practitioners see the Internet as having a significant impact on the industry (Porter & Sallot, 2003).

The online, Australia/New Zealand study was located at: <http://www.survey.lsu.edu/publicrelations>. It was created, hosted and maintained by the Public Policy Research Laboratory at Louisiana State University. A localized redirect to the study occurred at: <http://prethics.massey.ac.nz>. The redirect was hosted by the Department of Management at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. Completion rate success mirrored that of the U.S. sample, with 96 percent of those who started the study (101 out of 105) finishing it.

Values were assigned for the six dilemmas. A decision to take action was coded as “1,” “2” for undecided, and “3” for “can’t decide.” Responses left blank were coded as “can’t decide.” The twelve statements per dilemma indicating their importance in influencing the overall decision were coded as “5” for “Great,” “4” for “Much,” “3” for “Some,” “2” for “Little,” and “1” for “None.”

At the conclusion of each dilemma, respondents were instructed to rank four of these twelve statements as “most important,” “second most important,” “third most

important” and “fourth most important.” Variables for these rankings correspond to the statement numbers selected to fill these four designations.

In order to test the validity of the statements written by the author to represent stages 5 and 6 of Kohlberg’s Moral Development scale, bivariate correlations were performed. If all six dilemmas are consistently measuring the same theoretical constructs, significant correlations are expected between stage 5 and 6 questions from each dilemma and those from at least two other dilemmas. These correlations were produced by this study.

The level of moral development, or *P*-index, was calculated using the following method:

- a) A review of the four statements per dilemma indicated as “most important,” “second most important,” “third most important” and “fourth most important.”
- b) If a Stage 5 or 6 statement was selected under one of these four designations, they were assigned the following values: most important=4, second most important=3, third most important=2, fourth most important=1. These values were summed together for each dilemma, for all six dilemmas for a range of 0 to 10.
- c) The total summed score was divided by the number of dilemmas--in this instance, six. This quotient, multiplied by 10, is considered an individual’s level of moral development or *P*-index.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

FINDINGS

STUDY 1: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN/NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

As alluded to earlier, there were two primary purposes behind these 11 qualitative interviews. First, they were intended to provide insight into the nature of the Australian and New Zealand public relations industries, the types of issues confronted in the region and likewise the available response mechanisms for area practitioners to ethical conundrums. Second, interview results would be used to generate two regional, public relations specific dilemmas for the Defining Issues Test that followed.

NATURE OF THE INDUSTRY

In analyzing these interviews, several characteristics clearly emerged about the Australia and New Zealand public relations industries. Nearly all interviewees in both countries suggested that their vocation had a bad reputation and was poorly regarded by the public. For example:

The man in the street doesn't know what PR is, except that they read all about the spin. They may be aware that there's a great deal of sanitization, and people in government and business dealing with the media [are] almost pulling the wool over people's eyes (PR6).

There's definitely a perception amongst some people -- even amongst practitioners -- that PR ethics is an oxymoron, which is a shame and definitely a real problem (PR4).

I think there's a general suspicion of so-called 'spin doctoring,' and the whole perception of that (PR7).

Some felt that changes within the industry over time exacerbated this problem:

The issues are bigger, the use of PR is much more widespread than it was a decade, twenty years ago (PR3).

This practitioner added that public relations' currently poor reputation was justified; unethical activity is simply the nature of the vocation:

If I walk away [from an ethical issue], somebody else is there to take it on (PR3).

It's just our job, what's the big deal (PR3)?

Numerous interviewees argued that the public relations field actually condones unethical behavior by its practitioners, and that sanctions for such actions were not particularly strong:

If somebody gets a story in the paper...by *sharp practice*, and you don't because you've behaved in a way that you believe is ethical and get fired as a result of it, there's obviously pressure on you to push the boundaries and be a *sharp practitioner* (PR4, emphasis added).

Particularly in large consultancies when the pressure from headquarters in New York or London is to deliver profits and margins, any practitioner who gets a reputation in his company for saying 'no' to clients on what that practitioner believes is ethical grounds hasn't got a big future in that company. Professional association and that means nothing (PR1).

I believe that [unethical behavior] is rewarded, and I certainly have some personal experience to say that it has been. I also have some cases that I can think of where it hasn't been. It has come with some price – it has its attendant risks, particularly if everyone else isn't playing by the same rules (PR5).

One interviewee, however, indicated that ethical relativism (Blocker, 1986; Pojman, 1999) guided practitioner decision-making, and differences depended solely on public relations job sector:

Acting ethically would be rewarded, and there's certainly no pressure or no suggestion that one should act unethically. But the

fact is that I work in the public sector, and it might be quite different if I worked for a private company (PR7).

Related, another suggested that the greatest fear of sanction might actually be from his/her particular employer (versus the vocation itself):

Internal sanctions could be quite severe if you put the reputation of the organization at risk by acting less than ethically or less than honestly (PR7).

Although many interviewees deemed the public relations “industry” as unethical, these individuals noted external considerations as the true culprits. The “bad” nature of the current business system combined with its highly competitive nature often placed practitioners in a role as unwilling scapegoats of a worse, frequently much bigger business dilemma:

[PR people] are the ‘patsies.’ If [the organization] wants to engage in unethical behavior, send out the PR person to pave the way (PR3).

What you’re talking about is really bigger than simply the PR practitioner. We’re talking about corporate behavior – we’ve got to look at the Enron’s – who can stop that? (PR3).

These days in Australia, the CEO generally won’t front...so that is what the company spokesperson’s job is (PR6).

Those pressures are very real because we operate in a capitalist society and a competitive society where information is power... and if you are able to keep certain things secret at certain times, it’s going to be to your advantage (PR4).

Agency practitioners in particular identified an additional, ethical external consideration placed upon them via demands and pressures by unethical clients:

These pressures were expected. Clients who don’t know a lot about the PR industry ask you to do things that are either not possible or unethical. Not frequently, but sometimes, I have to tell clients, ‘look

you can't lie.' There are still some people around who think that they can fix things by lying (PR1).

There are such pressures upon them to conform to a behavior dictated by a client or management...where do you say 'no' (PR3)?

To answer your question...the big issues with PR ethics is probably people, clients, companies, requiring or demanding results of their PR people (PR4).

Globalization exacerbated these external considerations, introducing another dimension to what was deemed as "acceptable" ethical practice within public relations:

It's very hard for, say a small Australian office in a big global consultancy, to say 'no' to New York or London or Tokyo. So there is that pressure there, and all these global consultancies emphasize how they've got to shed work to each other. Different cultures have different ethical environments. In China there's a culture of paying journalists (PR1).

Another offered a dependency thesis (Pojman, 1999) for determining standards of acceptable ethical behavior, potentially fluid guidelines determined solely by time:

The issue is understanding what the boundary lines are and knowing what you should and shouldn't do. The challenge for PR practitioners is to understand where the boundary lines are, and those boundaries lines change over time (PR4).

Finally, the way in which individual organizations were structured likewise emerged as a significant, contributing factor to unethical behavior:

It would be difficult [to turn down a client] in a large agency. I now have a specialist small company so it's easy for me to say 'no' (PR1).

I don't really get close enough on issues...as we're relatively small here (PR6).

There's a higher standard for us in many ways because we're big and we're wealthy and we're powerful and influential. People have higher standards and they talk about us a lot more (PR2).

I think everybody is aware of it, but I don't know that we've got any better at it...the problems. As the PR practitioner has got more and more responsibility, and the PR practitioner climbs higher in the structure -- even up to board levels -- the problem will get worse if we can't find a way to address it (PR3).

ETHICAL ISSUES FACED

While these 11 interviewed practitioners clearly faced a number of ethical dilemmas and situations, during these interviews, however, many had difficulty articulating specific examples. Despite this difficulty, two practitioners argued that ethics remained an important topic of discussion professionally. For example:

Ethics is absolutely center ground of discussion [within our peer group]. The linkage between ethical behavior and the values and principles of the organization for whom you work is under discussion. There are various fora around that provide the opportunity for corporate affairs executives to talk about these sorts of issues (PR2).

Another suggested that ethical discussion tends to be driven by the personal crusade of a few committed individuals, and more often than not emerged out of particular crises or scandals:

One of the big thrusts of the global alliance, partly because one person has picked it up, has been PR ethics and trying to get a global code of ethics going. It's been driven by a guy from Canada who is the Chair-elect of the global alliance because that is one area that the global alliance has progressed more than any other. That was the main focus of this Italian conference in Rome in June of last year. This is a bit of a personal crusade by Jean. There [was], in New Zealand, a huge discussion about ethics because of the Timberlands case [because] it was [so] issue-driven. Again, this was a personal crusade by Nicky Hagar; because he forced attention about the Timberlands case it became a big issue (PR4).

While it was difficult for interviewees to recall particular ethical situations, a closer analysis of the interviews (within the latter steps of the data interpretation phase) revealed a number of distinct issue types operating at various levels within the public relations industry. For instance, ethical issues emerged from the characteristics of how public relations organizations were managed. These characteristics, some stated, were common among professional services vocations:

[Some of these issues relate to] the ethics of practice. For example, a senior consultant fronting a pitch for new business. When the client is won, the senior consultant never see[s] the client and the account [is] being staffed by juniors (PR4).

Once [lawyers] wouldn't advertise for clients. Now it's accepted practice that they do, and that once upon a time [that] would have been considered an ethical thing. It changes and then becomes accepted practice. Ethics are a product of culture and culture changes, and practices change (PR4).

One practitioner reasoned that all public relations issue types exist on three levels. The first of these were fairly low-level and obvious by nature, and included matters such as conflicts of interest:

The most obvious and, in fact, the easily dealt with ones arise over things like conflicts of interest and all their various forms...and usually they're relatively easy to deal with too (PR5).

More serious, 2nd level issues, dealt with items such as the sharing of information and challenges stemming from balancing public interest with issues of confidentiality and privacy:

The company is saying, 'well we're discussing this and the final decision hasn't been made and we're just planning for

contingencies.’ But I know very well that the final decision has been made and we’ve been working on it for three months. Companies...that’s business at the end of the day....they have to protect themselves...these things are a fact of life. But if you’re on site and someone asks you whether you’re planning a plant closure, it presents a real dilemma because you have to answer that. (PR6).

One of the single most common things that leads organizations into crisis is the failure to put in the public domain info that is clearly in the public interest, so that is the withholding of info. The second thing that exacerbates a company in crisis, once they’re there -- whether they recognize it or not -- is the tinkering with info which would lead one to suggest an organization is putting some info out there but not all of it. Then gradually, bit-by-bit, info is priced out of the organization (PR2).

The sorts of issues that you’re referring to really pivot around the provision of information. I would face decisions on what words, what info, goes to what audiences...that is a decision I face everyday...and it’s interesting. It’s not unlike that of a journalist, very similar trade and very similar decision-making. What I’m trying to say is in a commercial context there will always be info which is commercially sensitive which either isn’t in our interests to put in the public domain or would be commercially unwise to. There is always that caveat on information (PR2).

We’re here to serve the government of the day, and quite often in dealing with media queries you’re privy to info which, for one reason or another, it’s not appropriate to share with the journalist. You are occasionally asked reasonably pointed questions which put you in quite a difficult spot. You don’t want to lie but also you cannot tell the whole truth – it could be a very career-limiting move to do so. The decision is ultimately made by government and the message is pretty clear: These are the kinds of things we don’t really want to be talking about (PR7).

Finally, 3rd level issues were items pertaining to the democratic functioning of society and/or that which seriously impacted people’s rights and abilities to participate. One respondent classified these as: a) intense lobbying made possible through greater availability of resources, b) manipulation of media and public discourse, and c) the

creation of “news” for manipulative purposes. Another highlighted empowerment as a 3rd level issue, in specific the effect that an organization can have on the rights and abilities for others to participate in the communication process:

There’s a spectrum from communication at one end, joint participation at the other end, and consultation is somewhere in the middle. But anywhere along that spectrum we’re involved in sharing info with other parties. I think that one of the things that sometimes is quite subtle is the fact that sharing info with other parties is empowering to them. There is sometimes a tendency to -- if the other party isn’t already alert to the full range of their powers -- [that] someone says, ‘oh for heaven’s sake, if we tell them they’ve got the power to do all, that they’ll probably do it for all the wrong reasons...then we’ll be in this great big minefield, or whatever.’ But it seems to be that there is an ethical issue that in...not actively being willing to tell people about their role and the powers [that] they have, is in itself -- in my view -- unethical (PR5).

Despite recognition of 3rd level ethical issues, a concept of “public interest” emerged only twice during the 11 interviews of Australian and New Zealand practitioners. One interviewee suggested, “we’ll consider the public or national interest when we’re considering whether to take the brief (PR1),” while another pondered: “What is the ‘public interest’” (PR2)?

Some of the most well known, 3rd level public relations issues arose from scandals. Perhaps based on this reality, a handful of those interviewed cited the need for a clearer distinction to be made between “public relations” and “crisis management.” Not all scandals or crises, they argued, were public relations related. They harkened back to earlier discussion on external considerations, identifying many of the issues they faced as more generalized business ones.

The PR guy was trying to quantify the numbers. I think he handled that part of it...the whole issue moved on...and greater issues arose such as controls. The CEO should have got out and fronted from day one. He chose to put someone else out the front and close the door behind him: 'Go and talk on our behalf.' That borders on being an ethical issue for the PR person who has to accept what the management has told him. It's extremely hard...the guy is paid to do a job. He's being told by the CEO presumably, 'here's the situation, I don't want to front it as the CEO...it isn't a huge issue.' The guy was made to look like a bit of a goose. (PR6).

There are ethical dilemmas and business dilemmas that face us all the time. If, for example, we have what we call 'product legacy issues' - that is where you've got gas leaking under the fence line of a terminal and its drifting slowly but inexorably toward a housing estate -- do you go and tell the people who live in the houses? Or, don't you? They are the kind of issues that we face, not every day, but that's the sort of issue that we'd classify as an important *business* issue that requires not only *practical skills* to be brought to bear but also requires *judgemental issues*. Our [company's particular] approach is transparency and openness (PR2, emphasis added).

When public relations action is required in response to scandals or crises, one interviewee held that -- even in these types of situations -- practitioners can seek a higher, virtuous (Bonevac, Boone & Phillips, 1992) ethical ground.

Whether getting a company out of trouble is rewarded, yes it is, but I don't necessarily think that it is unethical. I think that [a public relations practitioner in this situation] is just someone who has managed hopefully to tell or convey to the various stakeholders a story that they accept. It doesn't necessarily mean that he's done anything unethical. All he has managed to do is take a bad situation and make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I don't think that that's an unethical thing: It's a skill in being able to negate the bad news and focus on the good news (PR6).

This same practitioner drew positive parallels between the aforementioned linkage between the public relations vocation and the legal one (Barney & Black, 1994), such that both represent all sectors of society:

Just like lawyers where there are so many strands of lawyer...it's the same with PR. There are some people in this town who do nothing else but take on controversial cases and love to front the media. [Similarly], there are PR people who are working within Telstra, and working in consultancies and in agencies who don't even talk to the media and who are doing completely different work. So the point I want to say to people about PR, 'look like lawyers; there are many different strands of lawyers and it's just the same with PR' (PR6).

Akin to lawyers representing unpopular clients, one practitioner mirrored Day (2003), reasoning that even socially unpopular businesses have a right of access to public relations resources:

Another issue is the ethics of promoting businesses which are seen to be socially undesirable. For example we have members that represent tobacco companies, and there are some that would argue that those are unethical businesses. Is it fair or a good thing to represent those companies? Where are the ethics? Those companies are legal companies – they run their business ethically (PR4).

Even in areas that aren't legitimate enterprises, for example, NORML – the outfit that's looking to promote marijuana and decriminalization. Here you have spokespeople for NORML, [and] you cannot simply say that because something is illegal that it should not be promoted. The fact of life is that legislators change the laws and you need to have lobbyists to change the law. Ethically you cannot say that you can't have members promoting activities that are unlawful because they have their reasons...they believe in something...and in a democratic society they should be heard (PR4).

This practitioner further qualified the preceding statements:

It's more [about] the *way* that the subject is debated or promoted rather than *what* is promoted (PR4, emphasis added).

RESPONSE APPROACHES

Regardless of client and/or issue type, practitioners interviewed overwhelmingly relied on personal values, their own Golden Mean (McKeon, 1947) standards of right and wrong when determining both ethicality and appropriate action:

It really comes down to the individual and his or her values (PR3).

If I walk away, someone else is willing to take it on. It's a very difficult [decision]...it may cost business. At least you can look yourself in the eye. Everybody is different and everybody is going to put a different interpretation on what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' (PR3).

There is an issue of standards involved in this sort of thing. You have to do a lot of deals with people in life, and your own standards of how you deal are not something that should be varied according to the situation. There are some fundamentals, and there has to be damn good reason to depart from those fundamentals if you ever do. I haven't yet come across a situation where I've needed to depart from those fundamentals (PR5).

Ethics is just basically a set of beliefs, and you comply or not. One person's ethics is not the same as another's (PR4).

There are certain cut-and-dry rules that you just don't break. One of those is that 'you do not lie to people.' But then it comes down to 'well, how can I not lie but still not release info that you really can't release' (PR7)?

Fittingly, different practitioners held different approaches to tackling ethical issues when outcomes were based solely on individual moral compasses. Echoing Mill (1861), one approach was simply to minimize the likelihood of being caught:

When the Timberlands case came up, a lot of senior practitioners looked at that and said, 'that's standard PR practice, what's the problem with that?' The silly thing that was done [by the practitioners involved] was noting down what they'd done. That's the sort of advice you would give verbally (PR4).

Others developed similar utilitarian (Mill, 1861) relationships with those who could potentially place them in difficult situations, such that an understanding was reached about the sensitivities surrounding a particularly troublesome situation:

The best way of dealing with [dilemmas] in terms of conversations with journalists is to actually be as up front as possible. In the interests of keeping up a good professional relationship with me, they don't really take you to task when they know they're putting you in a situation that is untenable. (PR7).

Echoing these sentiments, another interviewee concluded that the ideal approach was a deontological one (Kant, 1964) to simply be as honest as possible; it diminished room for error by all parties involved:

I think you get better results if everyone is fully informed, and therefore it is to one's own advantage (PR5).

There is sometimes a feeling that, 'oh gosh, they don't seem to know that they could take this course of action and if they don't know my life may be a lot easier, so maybe we'll just keep quiet about that.' But I think in the end, in the long term, the better investment is to have everybody's cards on the table. And if some people haven't quite seen what their cards are, make sure they're noticing all of their cards (PR5).

Some practitioners looked to formal organizational policies and procedures for guidance. One in particular highlighted the value and necessity of such Veil of Ignorance (Rawls, 1971) rules and systems:

We have a policy where we will not give quantum amounts [of information] in the early hours of a crisis. Now that isn't being unethical, it's sound information management not to make an announcement until you know its accurate (PR2).

We implemented (in Australia just last year and in New Zealand this year) not only a complete document which looks at the linkage between knowledge, values and behavior, but we've also

implemented an ethics helpline. What we've tried to do, what I've always conceptualized, what is in [company name], is a number of helium balloons. There's the helium balloon of core values. Then there's the helium balloon of general business principles. Then there's a local code of practice and then there's the ethics helpline and business policies. The document tries to bring together all these things in one place so that there is ready access to this information. The employees must sign for this document. Whe[n] there is a case of a misdemeanor or breach of ethics or breach or practice, it is not enough for the employee to say: 'I didn't know this thing existed' (PR2).

Others argued that these Rawls-ian (1971) methods -- while not always offering specific guidance -- at least yielded justification for a course of action taken:

One of the things I can do is encourage the person who is asking for the information to ask through official channels, i.e. The Official Information Act, and that's actually quite useful because then it may be kicking them into touch. Quite often it takes the dilemma out of my hands and puts it into the hands of the legal people. They can decide what is legally privileged information and what's not (PR7).

While there was some acknowledgement of the value of industry-level codes (PRIA, 2003; PRINZ, 2003) and practices for ethical guidance, there was also widespread recognition of the difficulties associated with creating a system based on ethical relativism (Blocker, 1986; Pojman, 1999):

The dilemma that the authors of a code of ethics face is how prescriptive can you get? Are you so prescriptive that you exclude behaviors which clearly are unethical or do you write something which seeks to capture every possible behavior that the PR practitioner might engage in (PR3)?

One of the huge difficulties with having a code of ethics is how prescriptive you can become. You can have a high level code, as we do, and the difficulty is the interpretation: What does that actually mean in a particular circumstance (PR4)?

Moreover, practitioners cited little evidence about the effectiveness of such systems:

In terms of a code of ethics or ethics panel being a good watchdog for ethics, it's not a good watchdog...it doesn't have the resources (PR4).

I could count on one hand the number of cases the ethics committee has dealt with (PR3).

Thus, interviewees returned to the convenience of self-enforced, TARES-like (Baker & Martinson, 2001) ethical decision-making norms even with industry-wide codes/practices in place:

Institutes can help create a framework, help people to think about things a little more than they might have previously. But at the end of the day, people have to act as they see it at that particular time (PR6).

STUDY 2: THE DEFINING ISSUES AND TARES TESTS

From analysis of the qualitative findings and their key themes emerged the quantitative portion of the research. As discussed earlier, qualitative data was applied to help create the final two DIT dilemmas and likewise served as a frame in which to interpret and discuss quantitative results. (This combined discussion comprises the chapter that follows.)

Being an Internet-based project, answers to questions within this second, quantitative study appeared in a digital format consisting of one database file per subject, in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format. As discussed earlier, the DIT includes a number of consistency checks for responses. Likewise, respondents who failed to answer a sufficient amount of TARES test items were flagged. Participants who failed the DIT checks and/or did not complete DIT or TARES test sections sufficiently were removed. This comprehensive data purging reduced the sample from 101 to 95 respondents. Mean

substitution was performed where appropriate in TARES test items, and did not exceed four percent.

In adhering to approaches often advocated in cross-cultural, psychological research (Bond, 1988; Hui & Triandis, 1985; Irvine & Carroll, 1980), this study employed three separate stages of analysis to determine potential construct relationships across Australia, New Zealand and U.S.-based (Lieber, 2003) public relations practitioners. This 3-step approach allowed for a more rigorous testing of the cross-cultural applicability of both the Defining Issues and TARES tests (Durvasula, Andrews, Lyonski & Netemeyr, 1993).

The first stage examined cross-cultural differences at the national level, such that Australia and New Zealand were analyzed as individual emic entities. As mentioned shortly, after an ANOVA uncovered no significant differences between practitioners from these countries, the two groups were subsequently combined. Results from this new joined entity – the second stage -- were then cross-culturally compared with earlier, emic research on U.S. practitioners (Lieber, 2003). Finally, after completion of these analyses, all three countries were merged together into a single dataset. This third, etic stage hoped to identify cross-cultural, public relations norms shared by all three communities.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Of the sample of 95, 68% were female, 32% male. Age ranged from 22 to 66, with a mean of 44 (sd=10.98) years old. Thirty percent of respondents lived in New Zealand, with the remaining 70% Australia-based. Of those residing in Australia, 56% lived in Victoria, 5% the Australian Capital Territory, 4% each from New South Wales and Western Australia, respectively, and 1% Tasmania-based. Self-reported ethnicity

closely mirrored geographic location. Sixty one percent classified themselves as Australian, 27% as New Zealand-European, and 12% as “other.” Fifty-one percent of all respondents possessed a graduate degree, 39% an undergraduate degree or equivalent, and 10% attained a high school diploma.

Similar to the United States where ex-journalists are actively sought to staff public relations positions, 38% of the 95 sampled came to public relations with an employment background in journalism or a related mass communication profession. Ten percent of respondents worked in an agency setting, 22% for corporations, 28% operated as solo practitioners or consultants, 16% served in a government or public affairs environment, 11% for a non-profit entity, and 14% were from academia. Managers to non-managers was a near even split, 49% to 51%, respectively. “Manager” status was determined by participants self-identifying that they managed other employees, these results cross-referenced with provided job title to ensure classification accuracy.

Participants tended to be more experienced, with an average tenure of twelve years experience (*s.d.*=8.42) in the field. (See **Table 2.**)

Table 2: Years Experience in Public Relations, AUS/NZ

| Years Experience | Percentage of Respondents (Rounded) |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 0-2 | 11 |
| 3-5 | 17 |
| 6-10 | 29 |
| 11-15 | 10 |
| 16-20 | 13 |
| 21-25 | 8 |
| 26+ | 7 |

In the category of religious beliefs, exactly half of all respondents self-identified as “Not Very Religious,” a 1 on a 5-point religiosity scale where 5=*Very Religious*.

Eleven percent and 20% ranked themselves a 2 or 3 in this category, respectively. The remaining 18% classified themselves as a 4 or as “very religious.”

Finally, in a 5-point scale measuring political view where 1=*Very Left Wing*, 3=*Centre* and 5=*Very Right Wing*, the vast majority of those surveyed considered themselves as somewhat liberal by nature. Forty five percent self-identified as centrist (3), 38% and 3% as a 2 or 1, respectively, on this 5-point political orientation scale. The remaining 14% considered themselves a 4; not a single individual self-reported his/her political views as “Very Right Wing.”

TESTING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There were four distinct groups of research questions, each with a similar organizational design. The first question of each group examined a potential relationship between a specified variable and Australia/New Zealand, practitioner moral development levels. Each group’s second question assessed the same specified variable, but in the context of these practitioners’ levels of ethical consideration. The third and final question of the group compared the results obtained in the first two questions with earlier research on U.S. practitioners (Lieber, 2003).

Research Questions: Group 1

For this first question group (RQ1a-c), individual p-scores were calculated from the Defining Issues Test via the methodology described earlier (RQ1a). Practitioners from Australia and New Zealand were subsequently pooled into a lone group for all remaining p-score analyses (RQ1a, RQ1c, RQ2a, RQ2c, RQ3a, RQ3c, RQ4a, RQ4c) after an ANOVA confirmed no significant difference in moral development levels

between them. Related crosstabs helped locate potential trends in p-scoring based on specific DIT dilemmas.

Individual reliability analyses were conducted on the five parts of the TARES test and likewise the Test as a whole to verify appropriate factor configuration (RQ1b). Poor discrete factor reliability led to an exploratory factor analysis for a more suitable grouping arrangement. Moreover, a comparative factor analysis using the arrangement obtained from the earlier U.S. study (Lieber, 2003) tested the potency of this alternative configuration on the current, combined Australia/New Zealand sample (RQ1c).

RQ1a: What is the mean level of moral development among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand?

On the Defining Issues Test, the score that constitutes moral development is the *P*-index, often referred to as the p score. The mean p score for all 95 public relations respondents in this study was 47.09 (*s.d.*=12.04), with a score range of 20 to 76.67.

When separated by country, the mean p score for Australian-based practitioners was 47.55 (*s.d.*=1.30), for New Zealand-based respondents 48.99 (*s.d.*=.96). There was no statistically significant difference in p scores based on country of origin ($F=.229$)

Individual analyses were conducted on the six dilemmas and the p scores obtained for each of them. For the collective Australia/New Zealand sample, the Heinz dilemma produced a mean of 4.64 (*s.d.*=2.08), the Doctor dilemma 5.89 (*s.d.*=2.07), Prisoner 4.09 (*s.d.*=2.07), and Newspaper 4.51 (*s.d.*=2.24). The public relations-specific Whistleblower and Client dilemmas yielded averages of 5.04 (*s.d.*=2.16) and 5.89 (*s.d.*=2.00), respectively (See **Table 3.**)

Table 3: Mean P Scores for Individual Dilemmas, AUS/NZ

| Dilemma | Mean P |
|-----------------|--------|
| Heinz | 4.64 |
| Doctor | 5.89 |
| Prisoner | 4.09 |
| Newspaper | 4.51 |
| Whistleblower** | 5.04 |
| Client** | 5.89 |

**Created dilemmas

RQ1b: What are the factors that best identify ethical consideration patterns of public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand?

A reliability analysis was conducted on the fourteen ethical consideration statements originating from the 5-part TARES test. Analysis focused on whether questions grouped together to measure individual constructs of Truthfulness (3 questions), Authenticity (3 questions), Respect (2 questions), Equity (3 questions) and Social Responsibility (3 questions), in fact, did so.

A reliability analysis on the TARES test as a collective yielded an alpha level of .74. Individual TARES test categories were reliable at the following levels (See **Table 4**): Truthfulness, alpha=.76; Authenticity, alpha=.45; Respect, alpha=.15; Authenticity, alpha=.31; Social Responsibility, alpha=.33.

Table 4: Reliability Analyses of TARES Test Items, AUS/NZ

| TARES Test Items | Reliability (alpha level) |
|---|---------------------------|
| Truthfulness (3 Questions) | .76 |
| Authenticity (3 Questions) | .45 |
| Respect (2 Questions) | .15 |
| Authenticity (3 Questions) | .31 |
| Social Responsibility (3 Questions) | .33 |
| TARES Test Complete (14 Questions) | .74 |

With four of five alpha levels falling below .70 -- the benchmark used for determining the reliability of a factor—an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to

locate a possible grouping alternative to the five-component TARES configuration. After discovering significant multicollinearity at the .01 and .05 levels for nearly all of these questions, the decision was made to use a varimax rotation to ensure the independence of the obtained factors.

Three factors were extracted consisting of 3, 5 and 3 items, respectively. These factors were labeled as “Truthfulness” “Audience” and “Self.” Truthfulness, as its name alludes to, maintained the same 3-question configuration as its namesake in the original TARES test design. The 5-question Audience factor dealt exclusively with items pertaining to message receivers. Finally, Self was composed of 3 questions with a common theme of individual responsibility by the communicator for his/her messages.

(See **Table 5** for factor loadings.)

TABLE 5: Factor Loadings of Ethical Consideration Statements, AUS/NZ ITEMS

| | FACTOR LOADING | | |
|--|----------------|-----|-----|
| Whether the communicator’s own honesty and integrity may be questioned as a result of this communication decision. | .85 | | |
| The accuracy of the content. | .77 | | |
| Whether the communicator would feel deceived if this communication was related to him/her in the same context. | .75 | | |
| Whether the target audience was unfairly selected due to their vulnerability to the content. | | .73 | |
| Certain groups might be unfairly stereotyped by this communication. | | .63 | |
| The context of the communication is fair. | | .62 | |
| Self-interest is being promoted at the expense of those being persuaded. | | .57 | |
| That the target audience is viewed by the communicator with respect | | .52 | |
| That the communicator would personally advocate the view he/she is presenting. | | | .73 |
| That the communicator would openly assume personal responsibility for the communication. | | | .67 |
| That the content of the communication promoted the principles the communicator personally believes in. | | | .62 |

The remaining three items either did not load sufficiently on any of the factors (“The target audience can completely understand the information being presented to them,” “People receiving the information will benefit from it”), or loaded across all of them (“The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society”). This latter item was both significantly and positively correlated with all three factors at $p < .01$ (See Table 6).

TABLE 6: Correlation between “The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society” (View Advocated) and Factors, AUS/NZ

| | TRUTHFULNESS | AUDIENCE | SELF |
|----------------|--------------|----------|---------|
| View Advocated | .422** | .380** | .314 ** |

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Factor 1, “Truthfulness,” was a mirror replica of the original TARES test configuration of the same name. Truthfulness (of the message), according to the TARES test definition of the factor, is the necessity for public relations communication to result in an audience with enough information to make an informed choice on the issue being presented (Baker & Martinson, 2001). Reliability of this factor was $\alpha = .76$.

Factor 2, “Audience,” dealt exclusively with items pertaining to message receivers. In specific, it called for a duty by strategic communicators to treat all potential audiences as equals, removing any and all forms of social differentiations from the decision-making process. This factor draws from Rawls’ (1971) utilitarian notion of a Veil of Ignorance, justice as fairness approach. All individuals—in this instance, message receivers—should be considered an equal part of society in both power and justice when disseminating messages. Reliability of the second factor was $\alpha = .60$.

The third factor, “Self,” was composed of statements signifying a communicator’s willingness to take responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions and to live with the results of this behavior. This factor echoes Kant’s (1964) deontological ethical

premise that higher truths of moral law exist within a person's conscience. According to this premise, an individual's action is deemed ethically justifiable if it is fit to be universally applied to all of society. Strategic communicators, according to Kant, should only partake in message dissemination that they can personally condone. Reliability of this final factor was $\alpha=.61$.

RQ1c: How do the findings in RQ1a and RQ1b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

P Scores

As indicated in RQ1a, the mean p score for all 95 public relations respondents in this study was 47.09 (*s.d.*=12.04), with a score range of 20 to 76.67. When separated by country, the mean p score for Australian-based practitioners was 47.55 (*s.d.*=1.30), for New Zealand-based respondents 48.99 (*s.d.*=.96).

In contrast, the average p score for an earlier study on 116 U.S. based practitioners (Lieber, 2003) was slightly lower at 45.41 (*s.d.*=13.18), with a score range between 8.33 to 73.33. Worth noting, however, is that the U.S. study lacked sufficient Stage 6 statements in one of the dilemmas, likely resulting in a lowered p score.

Mean p scores for individual dilemmas in the Australia/New Zealand sample were: Heinz 4.64; Doctor 5.89; Prisoner 4.09; Newspaper 4.51; and the public relations-specific Whistleblower and Client dilemmas, 5.04 and 5.89, respectively.

The U.S. study (Lieber, 2003) exhibited similar statistical trends at peak scores, such that Doctor (5.91) possessed the highest dilemma mean, with a Client, public relations-specific dilemma (5.78) a close second. For U.S. practitioners, Client was

followed by Newspaper (5.05), Heinz (4.86), Prisoner (4.35) then Cookies (4.29) (See **Table 7**).

Table 7: P Scores by Country, AUS/NZ & U.S.

| Dilemma | Mean P (Aus/NZ Combined) | Mean P (U.S.) |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Heinz | 4.64 | 4.86 |
| Doctor | 5.89 | 5.91 |
| Prisoner | 4.09 | 4.35 |
| Newspaper | 4.51 | 5.05 |
| Whistleblower (Aus/NZ), Cookies (US)** | 5.04 | 4.29 |
| Client** | 5.89 | 5.78 |
| ALL DILEMMAS | 47.09 | 45.41 |

**Created dilemmas

Finally, after pooling the Australia/New Zealand and U.S. datasets, an ANOVA of p score by country of origin revealed no statistically significant difference in respondents' level of moral development based on location ($F=.738$) (See **Table 8**). A post-test, power analysis (Dunlap, 1981; Cohen, 1988) confirmed the potency of this null hypothesis. Power for this study's combined dataset was estimated at greater than .90.

TABLE 8: ANOVA of Location and P Score, AUS/NZ & US $N=168$

| Source | Type III SS | MS | df | F |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------|-----|------|
| Location ^a | 116.059 | 116.059 | 1 | .738 |
| Error | 26115.274 | 157.321 | 166 | |
| Total | 387291.667 | | 168 | |

^a1=U.S.-based practitioners, 2=Australia/New Zealand-based practitioners

TARES Test

As mentioned in RQ1b, reliability analyses on the TARES test as a collective (all 14 questions) yielded an alpha level of .74 for the combined, Australia/New Zealand sample. Individual TARES test categories proved reliable at: Truthfulness, $\alpha=.76$;

Authenticity, $\alpha=.45$; Respect, $\alpha=.15$; Authenticity, $\alpha=.31$; Social Responsibility, $\alpha=.33$.

For the earlier study on U.S. practitioners (Lieber, 2003), the TARES test as a whole produced even higher reliability at $\alpha=.88$. Unlike the Australia/New Zealand population, reliability for individual TARES test categories was somewhat uniform across all 5 factors: Truthfulness, $\alpha=.60$; Authenticity, $\alpha=.57$; Respect, $\alpha=.60$; Authenticity, $\alpha=.66$; Social Responsibility, $\alpha=.62$ (See **Table 9**).

Table 9: Reliability Analyses of TARES Test Items AUS/NZ & U.S.

| TARES Test Items | Reliability (alpha level) Aus/NZ | Reliability (alpha level) U.S. |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Truthfulness (3 Questions) | .76 | .60 |
| Authenticity (3 Questions) | .45 | .57 |
| Respect (2 Questions) | .15 | .60 |
| Authenticity (3 Questions) | .31 | .66 |
| Social Responsibility (3 Questions) | .33 | .62 |
| <i>TARES Test Complete (14 Questions)</i> | .74 | .88 |

A comparative factor analysis was conducted on the 3-factor configuration derived from the earlier U.S. study (Lieber, 2003) to test for cross-cultural application of this alternative factor structure. These factors—“Civility,” “Integrity,” and “Credibility,” coincided with Day’s (2003) definition of moral knowledge. Civility, the “first principle” of morality, represented an attitude of self-sacrifice by the communicator in favor of overall respect for others (Day, 2003, pp. 11-12). Integrity was composed of statements signifying a communicator’s willingness to take responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions and to live with the results of this behavior (Day, 2003, p. 11.) Last, Credibility detailed a communicator’s ability to be believable and worthy of trust.

Reliability analyses for these factors on the U.S. sample of public relations yielded alpha levels of .82, .79 and .61, respectively (See **Table 10**).

TABLE 10: Factor Loadings of Ethical Consideration Statements, U.S.
ITEMS FACTOR LOADING

| | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| Whether the communicator would feel deceived if this communication was related to him/her in the same context. | .70 | | |
| The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society. | .69 | | |
| That the target audience is viewed by the communicator with respect. | .63 | | |
| People receiving the information will benefit from it. | .61 | | |
| Certain groups might be unfairly stereotyped by this communication. | .58 | | |
| The target audience can completely understand the information being presented to them. | .58 | | |
| Whether the target audience was unfairly selected due to their vulnerability to the content. | .57 | | |
| Self-interest is being promoted at the expense of those being persuaded. | .48 | | |
| That the content of the communication promoted the principles the communicator personally believes in. | | .86 | |
| That the communicator would personally advocate the view he/she is presenting. | | .81 | |
| That the communicator would openly assume personal responsibility for the communication. | | .70 | |
| The accuracy of the content. | | | .83 |
| The context of the communication is fair. | | | .72 |
| Whether the communicator's own honesty and integrity may be questioned as a result of this communication decision. | | | .54 |

These three factors were substantially less reliable for the Australia/New Zealand population, resulting in alpha levels of .61, .61, and .52, respectively.

Finally, akin to the Australia/New Zealand sample, the TARES test item “The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society” was significantly and positively correlated with all three extracted factors. For this U.S. population, this item

was highly correlated with Civility ($r=.612$, $p<.01$), Integrity ($r=.290$, $p<.05$), and Credibility ($r=.316$, $p<.01$). (See **Table 11**)

TABLE 11: Correlation between “The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society” (View Advocated) U.S. Factors, U.S. Study

| | CIVILITY | INTEGRITY | CREDIBILITY |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| View Advocated | .612** | .290* | .316 ** |

** $p<.01$ (2-tailed), * $p<.05$ (2-tailed)

Research Questions: Group 2

The second group of research questions (RQ2a-c) employed correlations to test for linkages both between practitioner p-scores and demographics (RQ2a), and likewise the factors extracted from the exploratory factor analysis in RQ1b and these same demographics (RQ2b). Overall TARES test results were similarly tested for correlation with individual demographics and p-scores (RQ2b). Related, demographic variables were analyzed for inter-correlational relationships among them in hopes of locating vocation-wide, demographical trends (RQ2a).

Akin to RQ1a, practitioners from Australia and New Zealand were subsequently pooled into a lone group for all remaining TARES test analyses after an ANOVA confirmed no significant difference in ethical consideration levels between them (RQ2b). A follow-up ANOVA between gender and overall TARES score (RQ2b) attempted to confirm a relationship between these two entities, one initially uncovered in correlational data (RQ2b).

RQ2a: Are variables identified as significantly correlated with moral development in other fields significant predictors for public relations in Australia and New Zealand?

Correlations were performed between overall p scores and the variables of age, gender, education, political view, religious beliefs and job tenure in public relations.

Political view was negatively and significantly correlated with individual p score ($r=-.46$, $p<.01$). Respondents holding a more left wing political persuasion were significantly more likely to possess higher levels of moral development.

Moreover, the variables of age, gender, job tenure and political view exhibited significant inter-correlational relationships. Older, more experienced respondents were typically male and likewise more right wing in political ideology (See **Table 12**).

TABLE 12: Correlations Among Age, Gender, Political View and PR Tenure, AUS/NZ

| | GENDER^a | POLITICAL VIEW^b | TENURE (YEARS) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| AGE | .351** | -.094 | .667** |
| GENDER | | .199 | .312** |
| POLITICAL VIEW | | | .248* |

** $p<.01$ (2-tailed), * $p<.05$ (2-tailed)

^a0=female, 1=male

^bOn a 5 point scale where 1=Very Left Wing, 3=Centre, 5=Very Right Wing

RQ2b: What variables are significantly correlated with ethical consideration factors?

There were no significant associations uncovered between any of the three extracted factors of Truthfulness, Audience and Self and practitioner age, gender, education, political view, religious beliefs or job tenure (See **Table 13**).

TABLE 13: Correlations Among Variables and Factors, AUS/NZ

| | AGE | GENDER^a | EDUCATION^b | POLITICAL VIEW^c | RELIGIOUS BELIEFS^d | TENURE (YEARS) |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| TRUTH | -.047 | -.132 | -.057 | -.096 | .089 | -.074 |
| AUDIENCE | .145 | -.190 | .045 | -.179 | -.089 | -.045 |
| SELF | .166 | -.061 | -.118 | .061 | .146 | .106 |

^a0=female, 1=male

^bIn a categorical variable, where 1=completed high school, 2=undergraduate degree, 3=graduate degree

^cOn a 5 point scale where 1=Very Left Wing, 3=Centre, 5=Very Right Wing

^dOn a 5 point scale where 1=Not Very Religious, 5=Very Religious

When separated by country, the mean overall TARES test score for Australian-based practitioners was 5.49 (*s.d.*=.74), for New Zealand-based respondents 5.32 (*s.d.*=.75). There was no statistically significant difference in overall TARES scores based on country of origin.

Overall TARES test results, however, were significantly and positively correlated with an individual's p score ($r=.256$, $p<.05$). Thus, a person who placed more emphasis on ethical consideration when faced with a difficult communication decision similarly self-reported higher levels of moral development.

Moreover, an ANOVA between gender and collective TARES test score uncovered a significant statistical difference in ethical consideration levels based solely on the sex of respondents ($F=4.08$, $p<.05$). Women in this sample indicated significantly higher levels of ethical consideration when confronted with a communication dilemma (See Table 14).

TABLE 14: ANOVA of Gender and Overall TARES Test Score, AUS/NZ $N=95$

| Source | Type III SS | MS | df | F |
|--------|-------------|-------|----|-------|
| Gender | 2.441 | 2.441 | 1 | 4.08* |
| Error | 53.843 | .598 | 90 | |
| Total | 2705.015 | | 92 | |

* $p<.05$ (2-tailed)

RQ2c: How do the findings in RQ2a and RQ2b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

P Scores

Unlike those sampled in Australia/New Zealand, for U.S. public relations practitioners (Lieber, 2003) there was no statistically significant relationship uncovered between their levels of moral development and any of the variables analyzed (Lieber, 2003).

Both studies, however, exhibited significant inter-correlational relationships between the variables themselves. Akin to the Australia/New Zealand population, older, more experienced U.S. respondents were typically male and likewise more right wing politically. These same individuals were also more religious by nature (See **Table 15**).

TABLE 15: Correlations Among Age, Gender and Political View, U.S.

| | GENDER^a | POLITICAL VIEW^b | RELIGIOSITY^c | TENURE (YEARS) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| AGE | .307* | .120 | .004 | .492** |
| GENDER | | .329** | .031 | .329** |
| POLITICAL VIEW | | | .249* | -.027 |
| RELIGIOSITY | | | | -.154 |

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed), * $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

^a0=female, 1=male

^bIn a combined index ($\alpha = .91$) of two, 7-point scale questions:

1. "Generally speaking do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent or Other?" (1=*Strong Democrat*, 4=*Independent*, 7=*Strong Republican*)
2. "Where would you place your place your political views on this scale?" (1=*Extremely Liberal*, 4=*Neutral*, 7=*Extremely Conservative*)

^cOn a 7-point scale where 1=*Extremely Non-religious*, 7=*Extremely Religious*

Moreover, in both studies, individual p scores were significantly and positively correlated with overall TARES test results. For the U.S., $r = .230$, $p < .05$, Australia/New Zealand, $r = .256$, $p < .05$.

TARES Test

Counter to this current study, extracted factors (Civility, Integrity and Credibility) from earlier, U.S. research (Lieber, 2003) produced a number of significant relationships with several key variables. Factor 1: Civility, yielded a significant and positive linear association between a person's educational levels and this factor's theme of self-sacrifice in favor of overall society. This factor also produced a negative linear relationship with

political ideology, denoting that participants leaning toward a Democratic political view and more liberal by nature tended to place significantly more weight on self-sacrifice in favor of overall society when faced with a difficult communication decision. Lastly, this factor correlated significantly and positively with age. Older respondents considered these concepts as more critical than their younger peers when confronted by a difficult communication decision (See **Table 16**).

Factor 2: Integrity was negatively correlated with gender, with women significantly more concerned than men on matters of integrity when encountering difficult communication decisions. Similar to Factor 1: Civility, this second factor produced a significant and positive linear association with levels of education.

Akin to Factor 1: Civility, Factor 3: Credibility, a communicator's ability to be believable and worthy of trust, likewise correlated significantly and positively with age.

TABLE 16: Correlations Among Variables and U.S. Factors, U.S.

| | Age | Gender | Education | Autonomy | Politics | Religiosity |
|--------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| CIVILITY | .305** | -.102 | .254** | .151 | -.253** | .083 |
| INTEGRITY | .079 | -.219** | .343** | .159 | -.087 | .038 |
| CREDIBILITY | .331** | -.071 | .065 | .006 | .105 | .064 |

*** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)*

Finally, after pooling the Australia/New Zealand and U.S. datasets, an ANOVA of overall TARES test score by country of origin revealed no statistically significant difference in respondents' level of ethical consideration based on location ($F=2.24$). As alluded to earlier, a post-test, power analysis (Dunlap, 1981; Cohen, 1988) confirmed the potency of this null hypothesis. Power for this study's combined dataset was estimated at greater than .90.

Research Questions: Group 3

Group three (RQ3a-c) highlighted potential associations between practitioner rank/authority and individual levels of moral development (RQ3a) and ethical consideration (RQ3b). Correlations were employed to test for these associations.

RQ3a: Are there significant associations in moral development between public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on rank or authority (manager vs. non-manager)?

A statistically significant, negative association was uncovered between management status and individual moral development levels for these populations. Non-managers in this sample expressed greater amounts of postconventional reasoning than their manager peers (See **Table 17**). Age of respondents was not significantly correlated with rank.

TABLE 17: Correlation Between P Score and Rank/Authority, AUS/NZ

| | Rank/Authority Managers=1 |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| P Score | -.032* |

*p<.05 (2-tailed)

RQ3b: Are there significant associations in ethical consideration factors among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on rank or authority (manager vs. non-manager)?

There was no statistically significant relationship uncovered between any of the three extracted factors of Truthfulness, Audience and Self and an individual's managerial status (See **Table 18**).

TABLE 18: Correlations Among Factors and Rank/Authority, AUS/NZ

| | Rank/Authority Managers=1 |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| TRUTH | .111 |
| AUDIENCE | -.006 |
| SELF | -.043 |

RQ3c: How do the findings in RQ3a and RQ3b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

P Scores

In contrast to the Australia/New Zealand findings, within the U.S. population (Lieber, 2003), management rank had no direct impact on individual levels of moral development.

TARES Test

In this earlier research (Lieber, 2003), its Factor 2: Integrity correlated significantly and negatively with rank, indicating that U.S. non-managers were more concerned than their supervisors with having to assume responsibility to society for the consequences of difficult communication decisions (See **Table 19**). Again, respondent age was not significantly correlated to their rank.

TABLE 19: Correlations Among Factors and Rank/Authority, U.S.

| | Rank/Authority Managers=1 |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| CIVILITY | -.038 |
| INTEGRITY | -.263** |
| CREDIBILITY | .035 |

**p<.01 (2-tailed)

Research Questions: Group 4

Finally, public relations job setting was accounted for in group four of the research questions (RQ4a-c). Multiple ANOVA's tested for differences in p-scores (RQ4a), TARES test factors (RQ4b) and overall TARES results (RQ4b) based on job

genre. Accompanying comparison of means tests (RQ4a-b) were run to take a closer look at these possible differences.

RQ4a: Are there differences in moral development among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on job setting (agency vs. corporate vs. solo practitioner/consultant vs. government/public affairs vs. non-profit vs. academia)?

No significant differences were uncovered in levels of moral development based solely on public relations job setting (See **Table 20**).

TABLE 20: ANOVA of Job Setting and P Score, AUS/NZ N=95

| Source | Type III SS | MS | Df | F |
|-------------|-------------|--------|----|-------|
| Job Setting | 878.98 | 175.80 | 5 | 1.222 |
| Error | 12660.06 | 143.86 | 88 | |
| Total | 222786.11 | | 94 | |

Mean p scores for individual job areas in Australia/New Zealand were: 46.48 (*s.d.*=12.84) for agency practitioners; 46.35 (*s.d.*=11.29) for corporate practitioners; 47.44 (*s.d.*=13.09) for solo practitioners/consultants; 41.78 (*s.d.*=8.51) for government/public affairs practitioners; 51.17 (*s.d.*=14.20) for non-profit based practitioners; and finally 51.67 (*s.d.*=11.82) for individuals in academia. (See **Table 21**.)

Table 21: Mean P Scores by Individual Job Setting, AUS/NZ

| Dilemma | Mean P |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Govt./Public Affairs n=15 | 41.78 (<i>s.d.</i> =8.51) |
| Corporate n=21 | 46.35 (<i>s.d.</i> =11.29) |
| Agency n=9 | 46.48 (<i>s.d.</i> =12.84) |
| Solo/Consultant n=26 | 47.44 (<i>s.d.</i> =8.51) |
| Non-Profit N=10 | 51.17 (<i>s.d.</i> =14.20) |
| Academic n=13 | 51.67 (<i>s.d.</i> =11.82) |

RQ4b: Are there differences in ethical consideration factors among public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand based on job setting (agency vs. corporate vs. solo practitioner/consultant vs. government/public affairs vs. academia)?

Similar to level of moral development, there were no statistically significant differences uncovered in the means of overall TARES test scores or in TARES test factors based solely on public relations job setting (See **Tables 22,23,24,25**).

TABLE 22: ANOVA of Job Setting and AUS/NZ Factor 1: Truth, AUS/NZ N=95

| Source | Type III SS | MS | Df | F |
|-------------|-------------|-------|----|------|
| Job Setting | 4.417 | .883 | 5 | .514 |
| Error | 151.328 | 1.720 | 88 | |
| Total | 3304.000 | | 94 | |

TABLE 23: ANOVA of Job Setting and AUS/NZ Factor 2: Self, AUS/NZ N=95

| Source | Type III SS | MS | Df | F |
|-------------|-------------|-------|----|------|
| Job Setting | 4.333 | .867 | 5 | .764 |
| Error | 99.787 | 1.134 | 88 | |
| Total | 2843.000 | | 94 | |

TABLE 24: ANOVA of Job Setting and AUS/NZ Factor 3: Audience, AUS/NZ N=95

| Source | Type III SS | MS | Df | F |
|-------------|-------------|-------|----|-------|
| Job Setting | 15.345 | 3.069 | 5 | 1.955 |
| Error | 138.177 | 1.570 | 88 | |
| Total | 2096.222 | | 94 | |

TABLE 25: ANOVA of Job Setting and Overall TARES Score, AUS/NZ N=95

| Source | Type III SS | MS | Df | F |
|-------------|-------------|-------|----|-------|
| Job Setting | 5.875 | 1.175 | 5 | 2.001 |
| Error | 51.669 | .587 | 88 | |
| Total | 2769.041 | | 94 | |

Mean TARES scores for individual job areas were: 5.41 (*s.d.*=1.19) for agency practitioners; 5.21 (*s.d.*=.65) for corporate practitioners; 5.56 (*s.d.*=.75) for solo practitioners/consultants; 4.93 (*s.d.*=.85) for government/public affairs practitioners; 5.41 (*s.d.*=.58) for non-profit based practitioners; and finally 5.71 (*s.d.*=.63) for individuals in academia (See **Table 26**).

Table 26: Mean Overall TARES Scores by Individual Job Setting, AUS/NZ

| Dilemma | Mean TARES |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Govt./Public Affairs n=15 | 4.93 (<i>s.d.</i> =.85) |
| Corporate n=21 | 5.21 (<i>s.d.</i> =.65) |
| Agency n=9 | 5.41 (<i>s.d.</i> =1.19) |
| Non-Profit N=10 | 5.41 (<i>s.d.</i> =.58) |
| Solo/Consultant n=26 | 5.56 (<i>s.d.</i> =.75) |
| Academic n=13 | 5.71 (<i>s.d.</i> =.63) |

RQ4c: How do the findings in RQ4a and RQ4b compare with those uncovered in earlier research on U.S. based practitioners?

P Scores

In the U.S. study (Lieber, 2003), “Non-profit” did not exist as a separate job setting category; its members were instead grouped within the government/public affairs bracket.

Mirroring practitioners in Australia/New Zealand, there were no statistically significant differences in U.S. respondents’ levels of moral development based solely on their job area. Mean p scores for this population by job setting were: 39.48 (*s.d.*=3.05) for agency practitioners; 39.82 (*s.d.*=2.78) for corporate practitioners; 52.22 (*s.d.*=4.98) for solo practitioners/consultants; 47.71 (*s.d.*=4.31) for government/public affairs practitioners; and 49.30 (*s.d.*=2.80) for individuals in academia. (See **Tables 27, 28**)

Table 27: Mean P Scores by Individual Job Settings, U.S.

| Dilemma | Mean P |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agency N=20 | 39.48 (<i>s.d.</i> =3.05) |
| Corporate N=39 | 39.82 (<i>s.d.</i> =2.78) |

(**Table 27** Continued)

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Govt./Public Affairs N=9 | 47.71 (<i>s.d.</i> =4.31) |
| Academic n=34 | 49.30 (<i>s.d.</i> =2.80) |
| Solo/Consultant n=6 | 52.22 (<i>s.d.</i> =4.98) |

Table 28: Mean P Score Rank based on Job Setting, AUS/NZ, U.S.

| RANK | AUS/NZ (Mean P score) | U.S. (Mean P score) |
|------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Academic, n=13 (51.67) | Solo/Consultant, n=6 (52.22) |
| 2. | Non-Profit, n=10 (51.17) | Academic, n=34 (49.30) |
| 3. | Solo/Consultant, n=26 (47.44) | Govt./Public Affairs ^a , n=9, (47.71) |
| 4. | Agency, n=9 (46.48) | Corporate, n=39 (39.82) |
| 5. | Corporate, n=21 (46.35) | Agency, n=20 (39.48) |
| 6. | Govt./Public Affairs, n=15 (41.78) | |

^aIn the U.S. study, Non-Profit was grouped into the Govt./Public Affairs Category.

TARES Test

Akin to moral development levels, there was likewise no statistically significant difference in ethical consideration factors for U.S. practitioners based solely on participant job setting (Lieber, 2003).

Mean U.S. TARES scores by individual job areas were 5.28 (*s.d.*=1.29) for agency practitioner; 5.56 (*s.d.*=.72) for corporate practitioners; 5.10 (*s.d.*=.87) for solo practitioners/consultants; 5.73 (*s.d.*=.56) for government/public affairs practitioners; and finally 5.91 (*s.d.*=.69) for individuals in academia (See **Tables 29, 30**).

Table 29: Mean Overall TARES Scores by Individual Job Setting, U.S.

| Dilemma | Mean TARES |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Solo/Consultant n=6 | 5.10 (<i>s.d.</i> =.87) |

(Table 29 Continued)

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Agency n=16 | 5.28 (<i>s.d.</i> =1.29) |
| Corporate n=19 | 5.56 (<i>s.d.</i> =.72) |
| Govt./Public Affairs n=8 | 5.73 (<i>s.d.</i> =.56) |
| Academic n=19 | 5.91 (<i>s.d.</i> =.69) |

Table 30: Mean Overall TARES Scores by Individual Job Setting, AUS/NZ, U.S.

| RANK | AUS/NZ (Mean TARES score) | U.S. (Mean TARES score) |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Academic, n=13 (5.71) | Academic, n=34 (5.91) |
| 2. | Solo/Consultant, n=26 (5.56) | Govt./Public Affairs ^a , n=9, (5.73) |
| 3. | Non-Profit, n=10 (5.41) | Corporate, n=39 (5.56) |
| 4. | Agency, n=9 (5.41) | Agency, n=20 (5.28) |
| 5. | Corporate, n=21 (5.21) | Solo/Consultant, n=6 (5.10) |
| 6. | Govt./Public Affairs, n=15 (4.93) | |

^aIn the U.S. study, Non-Profit was grouped into the Govt./Public Affairs Category.

Finally, after pooling the Australia/New Zealand and U.S. datasets, an ANOVA of overall TARES test score by country of origin revealed no statistically significant difference in respondents' level of ethical consideration based on location ($F=2.51$). As alluded to earlier in the context of p-scores, a post-test, power analysis (Dunlap, 1981; Cohen, 1988) added further credence to accepting a null hypothesis within this combined dataset. Power for this dataset was estimated at greater than .90.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

DISCUSSION

While literally on opposite sides of the globe, this first cross-cultural comparison of the ethical decision-making patterns of public relations practitioners yielded many similarities between its sampled populations of Australia, New Zealand and the earlier study on U.S. practitioners (Lieber, 2003). Despite obvious geographic, cultural, economic and ethnic distinctions among practitioners in these three countries, there were no statistically significant differences uncovered in both individual levels of moral development and ethical consideration. Thus, arguably the most significant outcome of this research was the discovery of a null hypothesis, non-significance between the two studies. The study's strong power (at greater than .90) supports such an argument.

The qualitative interviews provided even further proof of homogeneity between tested populations. The most frequently cited ethical challenges faced by these 11 practitioners were ones very familiar to their counterparts in the United States. Of all items mentioned, one of the greatest concerns that interviewees expressed was over the negative potential influences of external business considerations, specifically "being caught in middle." These worries closely mirrored strategic communication lessons learned from the recent U.S. recent dot com crash (Freeman, 2000; Dumiak, 2000; Lovel, 2001) and the unprecedented rise and fall of the Enron Corporation (Barnes, Barnett, Schmitt & Lavelle, 2002). Although bit players in these two events, public relations practitioners linked to them bear an arguably disproportionate amount of blame in the public's eyes.

Finally, this unexpected relation was perhaps most apparent by simply comparing demographics between the two studies. This Australia/New Zealand sample exhibited a 68%: 32%, female: male gender split. Similarly, the earlier U.S. population presented a 64% female, 36% male makeup. Mean ages of respondents were also nearly identical: 44 in Australia/New Zealand versus 42 for the United States. Similarly, manager to non-manager status was a 49%: 51% ratio in Australia/New Zealand, 54% to 46% within U.S. respondents.

Even politically these practitioners resembled one another: Both sampled populations scored near the exact median (3 of 5--Australia/New Zealand, 3.5 of 7--U.S.) on their respective left wing/right wing political scales. In both samples, older, more experienced respondents were typically male and likewise more right wing politically. In the U.S., these same individuals were also more religious by nature.

Rank/authority, a critical element in determining who makes the ethical decisions in public relations, remained an important variable in both studies. For Australia/New Zealand practitioners, non-managers placed significantly more importance on moral development matters. Similarly, in the United States, sampled, non-manager practitioners (Lieber, 2003) expressed significantly greater concern than manager peers over their ethical consideration factor of Integrity when facing a tough communication decision.

Management status has a long legacy as an important predictor of DIT p scores, most notably in the area of auditing. Research on auditors tested via the DIT found that moral judgment levels increased from staff to supervisory levels but sharply declined upon reaching the manager and partner ranks (Ponemon, 1990; Rest, 1994). Management

level practitioners, much like those of the same status in auditing, are likely more concerned with profit and operational affairs when confronting a conflict rooted in ethics.

These findings are extremely relevant in interpreting the results from this study for two reasons. First, not only was rank/authority an important ethical predictor variable across five unique public relations job settings, it likewise proved significant for three unique sampled populations regardless of practitioner age.

There were, however, some demographic differences among those sampled, albeit slight ones. As a whole, Australia/New Zealand practitioners self-identified as slightly less religious (2.1 out of 5, with 1 being “Not Very Religious,” 5=*Very Religious*) than their American counterparts (3.5 out of 7, where 1=*Extremely Non-religious*, 7=*Extremely Religious*). Moreover, despite the aforementioned similarity in age, practitioners from Australia/New Zealand tended to possess higher education (51% versus 48% in the U.S. population, respectively, attained a graduate degree), while on the flipside, also allowed those with less schooling to get a proverbial foot in the door. Ten percent of Australia/New Zealand practitioners listed a high school degree as their highest level of education. In comparison, only 3% of the U.S. sample self-identified in this category.

Any discussion of job area disparities, however, should begin with the discrepancy in academic representation between studies. Only 14% of this study -- versus 32% in the U.S. population (Lieber, 2003) -- resided in an academic environment. It stands to reason that an academic-based practitioner, on average, possessed higher levels of education than those in other public relations job areas. Thus, the 18% disparity

between samples likely resulted from an oversampling of academics in the earlier U.S. research.

Taking an even closer look at job area differences reveals an important regional vocational characteristic. Nearly 1/3rd of Australia/New Zealand respondents self-identified as solo practitioners, versus less than 10% of the previously sampled U.S. population. Interestingly enough, this 1/3rd figure might actually be an underestimate. Many of the public relations agencies in these former two locations are, in reality, business unions between solo practitioners.

While there are several possible explanations for the abundance of solo practitioners in Australia and New Zealand, perhaps the clearest justification lies in a purely economic one. Both the combined gross domestic product (GDP) and populations of Australia and New Zealand pale in comparison to the United States. The U.S. currently claims a nearly 20x GDP (International Monetary Fund, 2003) and 12x population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; Statistics: New Zealand, 2004) advantage in these two categories, respectively. Devoid of a vast economic and human resource infrastructure, Australia and New Zealand firms rely on a more affordable, solo practitioner-driven system. This system simply makes monetary sense both for potential clients and the practitioners looking to service them.

Although job setting was a statistically insignificant variable for this study, public relations ethical norms, however, are always a product of the environment in which they reside (Fitzpatrick, 2002b). Thus, differences in TARES factor structure between these two regions perhaps resulted from such vocational system disparities. Unlike the three moral knowledge factors of Civility, Integrity and Credibility (Day, 2003) present in the

U.S. study (Lieber, 2003), this later Australia/New Zealand research failed to uncover a truly distinguishable alternative factor configuration both statistically and theoretically. The alternative configuration consisting of Truthfulness, Audience and Self lacked the internal reliability in the latter two categories (.60 and .61, respectively) to warrant comparisons to the stronger, theoretically valid moral knowledge arrangement. Moreover, two items failed to sufficiently load on any of the factors, and one loaded across all three. Simply put, despite the overall poor reliability of the original TARES test configuration, an alternative arrangement via exploratory or comparative (moral knowledge) options did little to support an argument favoring alternative factor structure.

This finding – or lack thereof -- highlighted perhaps the central philosophical distinction between the sampled public relations communities of Australia/New Zealand and those in the United States. Unlike the U.S. public relations creed (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 2001) and its accompanying ethical codes (Fitzpatrick, 2002a; Briggs & Bernal, 1992) stressing a duality in service expectation, practitioners in Australia/New Zealand not only failed to address “public interest” in the 11 qualitative interviews, one interviewee even questioned the very necessity of such an interest at all.

This difference in “public interest” ideology was likewise reflected in a comparison of factor themes across studies. While both Truthfulness and Audience (in this current research) called for message receivers to be informed and likewise treated as equals, these two factors were devoid of the prosocial, self-sacrifice obligations stressed by the Civility factor of the U.S. study (Lieber, 2003). As a collective, the Australia/New Zealand factors of Truthfulness, Audience and Self encouraged an honest, fair and equitable approach to strategic communication. In contrast, the U.S. moral knowledge

factors of Civility, Integrity and Credibility (Day, 2003) pushed for ethical obligations by practitioners that transcended Rawls-ian (1971), social contract ethics and bordered on the realm of natural law.

This is not to say, however, that this sample of Australia/New Zealand practitioners are devoid of concern for message receivers when conducting everyday activities. Rather, for these individuals, notions of a public interest was a likely by-product of adherence to related ethical constructs versus an overt ethical creed akin to that expressed within the Public Relations Society of America's Code of Ethics (Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

Extending this public interest dichotomy even further, the TARES test – it should be noted -- was designed by American scholars and likewise for a U.S.-based practitioner pool. In specific, it relies on classical meta-normative, public interest principles as its ethical guiding force. With this in mind, it is not surprising that a single factor TARES test displayed lower internal reliability among Australia/New Zealand practitioners (.74) than the U.S. audience it was intended for (.88). It stands to reason that the TARES test seemed more coherent and also more applicable to the sampled population for whom it was designed for in the first place.

The same argument holds true for the Defining Issues Test. Although extensively tested cross-culturally for decades, the DIT shares a common fate with the TARES test in being an American test created by U.S. academics. Numerous Australia/New Zealand respondents expressed concern over the very “American nature” of the instrument, such that several dilemmas and the response items that followed contained a heavy, North

American language and cultural influence. This influence became readily apparent when scrutinizing results obtained from 3 of the Test's 6 dilemmas.

As mentioned above, there were no statistically significant differences in p scores based solely on practitioner country of origin. A comparison of means between individual dilemmas, however, yielded some valuable cross-cultural insights. For both tested populations, the Doctor dilemma scored highest in individual p score, perhaps because of its universal applicability across cultures. This dilemma was a relatively straightforward, life-or-death scenario, powered by near-universal moral and ethical values likely shared by all advanced Western civilizations. Both Australia/New Zealand and U.S. respondents registered nearly alike on the Doctor dilemma, with means of 5.89 and 5.91, respectively.

The two Client, public relations-specific dilemmas displayed a similar trend to Doctor, although for a completely different reason. For Australia/New Zealand practitioners, Client tied for highest average p score (5.89) while registering as second highest (5.78) among U.S. respondents. Moreover, the gap between average Client p score and the next closest dilemma was a whopping .85 for Australia/New Zealand, .73 for the United States (Lieber, 2003). In short, Doctor and Client were --- far and away -- the two dilemmas to which respondents in all three countries applied the maximum amounts of postconventional reasoning in solving.

Although the Client dilemmas were custom-created for each study, the two versions shared a great deal more than simply the same name. They both contained a common vocational dilemma of whether to accept a controversial client, each based on high profile, and historically accurate events unique to the region on which it was tested. For Australia/New Zealand, Client was designed using information obtained from the 11

qualitative interviews and backed by the Shandwick/Timberlands scandal (Hager & Burton, 1999; Rowell, 1999; McManus, 2001) as a historical reference point. For the earlier U.S. research (Lieber, 2003), Client was mirrored after the controversial, August 1990 events at public relations agency Hill & Knowlton. A lobbyist group backed by the Kuwaiti government hired the firm to build support for a Persian Gulf War, a position simultaneously advocated by then U.S. President George Bush (Pratt, 1994).

In contrast, the Newspaper dilemma relied on a freedom of speech justification for potential action, a concept very American in nature by virtue of its First Amendment, U.S. Constitutional origins. Not surprisingly, practitioners from these two studies were furthest apart in average scoring on this versus any other dilemma, a difference of over an entire half a point in p score. As could be expected, U.S. practitioners (mean=5.05) identified much more closely with this dilemma and its Constitutional tone than their Australia/New Zealand counterparts (mean=4.05).

Evidenced by the Doctor and Client dilemmas, certain ethical principles can transcend regional biases. The same discovery occurred for one TARES test item in particular. That “The view being advocated might cause harm to individuals or society” was deemed an extremely significant issue for both tested populations, significantly correlating with Truthfulness, Audience and Self factors in this study and Civility, Integrity and Credibility among U.S. respondents (Lieber, 2003). The potency of this TARES test variable was not surprising. It likely resonated clearly with Australia/New Zealand practitioners who witnessed firsthand how poor communication tactics by an organization greatly intertwined with the general public can lead to disastrous results. Several of the 11 interviewed practitioners voiced a necessity for raised levels of ethical

awareness by strategic communicators in the wake of the National Australia Bank (BBCa, 2004; BBCb, 2004; BBCc, 2004) and Timberlands (Hager & Burton, 1999; Rowell, 1999; McManus, 2001) scandals. Similarly, the U.S. study was not far removed from recent corporate communication debacles at Enron (Barnes, Barnett, Schmitt & Lavelle, 2002) and WorldCom (Kadlec, Fonda & Parker, 2002). Millions watched their savings dwindle away, their retirement funds disappear, as two utility companies expected to provide services to the American public collapsed into financial abyss.

Both studies produced a statistically significant association between practitioner levels of ethical consideration and moral development, further strengthening arguments about a possible linkage between these concepts. While the TARES test isn't directly concerned with matters of moral development, its ethical considerations closely resemble the postconventional principles espoused by Kohlberg's (1979) theories. Further, both are rooted in classical and contemporary ethical theory, and look toward virtue, social contract, deontological, teleological and natural law traditions as guides to being ethically fit.

Gender – oft debated within DIT circles as a significant variable in predicting moral development – proved non-significant to p scores in both the Australia/New Zealand and U.S. (Lieber, 2003) studies. This variable, however, produced a statistically significant relationship with the closely related TARES test results for these same populations. Women, on average, consistently scored higher than men in overall levels of ethical consideration.

While some have argued that gender plays no role in explaining differences in p scores (Rest, 1983), other studies did in fact uncover this relationship, with women time

and again scoring higher in moral development levels (Thoma, 1986). As mentioned earlier, Gilligan (1982) reasoned that women are developmentally conditioned to be more inclined toward ethical consideration of others. This, Gilligan termed as an “ethic of care.”

With women comprising a vast majority of the public relations vocation – 68 percent of this sample, 64% in the U.S. study were women – the role of gender in ethical consideration should not be understated. If more men begin to find a place within public relations, future studies may want to analyze potential shifts in ethical decision-making patterns.

Also evident in both studies was the hypothesized relationship between journalism and public relations. Thirty-eight percent (Australia/New Zealand) and 40% (U.S.) of those sampled, respectively, came to public relations with a background in journalism or a similar mass communication discipline. This journalism influence was readily apparent such that left wing, more liberal respondents in all three countries were significantly more likely to possess higher levels of moral development. For decades, liberal political views have been associated with a greater preference toward postconventional reasoning, resulting in higher p scores for individuals with this political stance (Kohlberg, 1981; Rest, 1986).

Finally, the Defining Issues Test rewarded respondents from both tested populations who resided in job areas that tended to promote postconventional thinking. The highest p scores emerged from practitioners in public relations sectors often free of the external considerations lamented by the 11 qualitative interviewees. Academics, solo practitioners, and those in non-profits scored highest in both studies. Agency and

corporate practitioners scored nearly alike in both Australia/New Zealand and the U.S. (Lieber, 2003), not surprising since the two job areas require tasks that are nearly indistinguishable.

Perhaps the greatest similarity of all between public relations practitioners across these three countries is the shared recognizance that, in the end, ethical responsibility falls upon the shoulders of individual practitioners. This recognizance appeared in both the Australia/New Zealand qualitative interviews and likewise numerous emails from U.S. practitioners following their earlier study (Lieber, 2003), individuals who voiced their approval for a dialog – at last! – on what remain subjective and amorphous ethical standards for their field.

With such similarities in ethical reality, the sameness in both individual levels of moral development and ethical consideration for these three countries is not surprising. While this cross-cultural study employed massive amounts of information -- quantitative data from 200+ practitioners, a dozen interviews, hundreds of email and telephone communications, countless research articles on ethics and/or public relations, etc. – the same finding appeared and then re-appeared consistently. Strategic communicators across Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. may be separated by half the globe, but in the end uniformly identified ethics as a critical part of their worldwide vocation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Similar to the U.S. study that preceded it (Lieber, 2003), this research continued to forge new ground in quantitatively gauging public relations moral development and ethical consideration via an online format.

Placing this portion of the study online allowed for quick, cost-effective and widespread access to a respondent pool that otherwise would have been near impossible to reach. Quantitative completion rates confirmed the strengths of this medium: Of the 105 who began the online study, 101 completed it (96 percent).

This medium, however, also had its drawbacks. Response rates were impossible to discern based on the limitations of email. Related, the ever-increasing sensitivity of junk mail filters built into mainstream email programs likely blocked several invitations from arriving at potential respondents' inboxes. While follow-up, reminder invitations were distributed, there is no way of knowing whether this second wave of messages met the same fate as its predecessors.

Akin to the U.S. research (Lieber, 2003) before it, the results of this study should be viewed with caution before considering them as a benchmark for the public relations industries as a whole as well as to use its p scores in comparison to other DIT results. The stages identified by Kohlberg as most important may not be viewed as such by all who complete the test. Similarly, his postconventional stage is not necessarily a perfect definition of communitarian principles. These are important distinctions, since answers to questions based on these stages determine a person's level of moral development.

Related, despite an original 5 factor configuration and two plausible 3 factor alternative arrangements, it is important to recognize the potential for discriminant validity issues in a quantitative, TARES test construct. Both the test's original authors -- via creation of separate TARES categories -- and this current study -- through a varimax rotation of TARES items -- attempted to address such issues. The TARES test, however, is derived from higher order, ethical influences encompassing a plethora of often

overlapping concepts. Thus, a perfect absence of discriminant validity among its 14 tested items is likely unavoidable.

Finally, as with any self-reported study, there is no way to perfectly gauge the concept/s being analyzed. Despite a discovery of significant associations and correlations, this study does not come with a guarantee that a participant's response on ethical dilemmas and statements is indicative of how they react in their actual job. Also, being an exploratory, cross-cultural study, participants in both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this research were obtained from a convenience versus a probability sample. Although this method of data collection was justified (see page 45), there is no guarantee of these samples being 100% representative of their country's strategic communication communities. As a result, the variability of the statistics and findings in this study cannot truly be estimated.

CONCLUSIONS

At first glance, the global public relations community faces what appears to be a troubling, perhaps insurmountable, challenge. Plagued by nearly 5 years of recent business scandals and strategic communication mishaps, practitioners the world over are being forced to defend both their individual and vocational reputations. Industry associations offer little support other than kinship, lacking the enforcement mechanisms, educational and certification standards, and overall guidance to protect its members. Left to fend for themselves, practitioners rely on amorphous ethical self-standards in an attempt to avoid the next Timberlands (Hager & Burton, 1999; Rowell, 1999; McManus, 2001) or National Australia Bank (BBCa, 2004; BBCb, 2004; BBCc, 2004) debacle.

This research, however, offers some much-needed hope. In this first cross-cultural analysis of the ethical decision-making patterns of three public relations communities, statistical evidence unfolded of the emergence of true etic industry norms.

Not only were practitioners in Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. mirror images of each other demographically, they shared comparable political beliefs, perceptions of vocational norms and likewise standards of right and wrong for their field.

More importantly, these practitioners exhibited a powerful commonality in moral development and ethical consideration. Despite significant geographic, cultural, economic and ethnic differences, practitioners from these two studies not only reasoned extensively about professional ethics, they did so in a statistically similar fashion.

There is, however, credence to an argument that homogeneity across sampled populations is a product of aforementioned language, democratic and capitalist commonalities (see page 44). Although with such glaring geographic, cultural and ethnic disparities between Australia, New Zealand and especially the United States (Lieber, 2003), these commonalities can control for similarities only up to a certain point.

Moreover, even with glaring contrasts in organizational norms and perceived duties (i.e. the abundance of solo practitioners in Australia and New Zealand, the disparity over “public interest”), both the Defining Issues and TARES test confirmed the presence of an analogous pattern of ethical problem-solving shared by all respondents sampled and/or interviewed. In sum, it was a pattern reflective of a public relations practitioner.

This research is but a first step. Despite the seemingly blinding spotlight currently fixated on the public relations vocation, there is an amazing dearth of quantification-

based research on either the field's practices or its practitioners. A logical next endeavor would be a more focused look at specific ethical nuances unique to public relations. The surprising finding of a difference in "public interest" between Australia/New Zealand and the U.S. would be a wonderful place to start. Qualitative and/or quantitative, cross-cultural research on international perceptions of corporate social responsibility could potentially yield valuable insight on duality of service expectations. Related, a closer analysis of the aforementioned, controversial practice of selective truth telling (Carr, 1968; Kornet, 1997) might produce tangible data on some of concerns raised by the 11 interviewees over this habit.

New methods would be needed to acquire this data. While the TARES and Defining Issues Tests proved their worth in two separate studies, neither was designed with a specific purpose of quantitatively measuring public relations ethical consideration and/or moral development. Measures created for this specific purpose and vocation might also avoid the regional biases both mentioned by some Australia/New Zealand respondents and hypothesized through data analysis.

Ethics, however, do not exist on an island. While ethical camps are certainly present, there is no pure form of deontology (Kant, 1964) or utilitarianism (Mill, 1861), and likewise no isolated instance of ethical consideration free of a moral development influence. Moral reasoning, for instance, generally encompasses a number of ethical perspectives. Thus, it is not surprising that the 11 interviewed practitioners relied on diverse ethical approaches as justification for their actions and decisions.

Instead of searching for a one-size-fits-all instrument or strategy to solving ethical dilemmas, public relations scholars need to follow suit to these interviewees. They must

recognize that the ethical answer is likely a hybrid one, the same approach used in creating a field according to duality in service expectations.

The first step must be to move away from models and toward tangible ethical norms and standards. While public relations claims recognizance of a “public interest” that would classify it as a virtuous profession, it ironically fails to fulfill the professional guidelines proposed by Fitzpatrick and Gauthier’s (2001) Professional Responsibility model. Further, there is no universal education, standardization and/or ethical training in public relations anywhere in the world.

As a result, public relations ethical dilemmas often result in catastrophe as practitioners fail to select either a Golden Mean (McKeon, 1947), Happiness Calculus (Solomon & Greene, 1999), Veil of Ignorance (Rawls, 1971), or Categorical Imperative (Kant, 1964) outcome that is appropriate. Simply put, no ethical model can be constructed for public relations until the industry, its practitioners, training grounds, vocation norms, and membership organizations establish some form of professional guidelines within which ethical pegs can then fit into ethical holes.

Moreover, while practitioners and the businesses that employ them are actively engaging in a dialog about their industry, more often than not it is simply just that: a dialog. Dozens of industry organizations have emerged from these dialogs with a stated purpose of fixing the field’s ethical problems (AFXNews.com, 2004; Cordasco, 2003; Associated Press, 2003). There is little, however, tangible proof that any of these organizations are having an actual impact in shaping public relations activities. Shouting from the rooftops that quantifiable reform is needed does not equate to it actually taking place.

There is no better time than the present to remedy these deficiencies. With unprecedented attention and dialog on the topic of public relations ethics, the timing is ripe for continued dialog and more widespread quantification. Funding should be sufficient to support such studies, from businesses eager to regain lost public relations budgets to practitioners aching for a return of their credibility post dot-com crash.

The benefits of quantifying both public relations and its ethics are seemingly immeasurable. Similar to the reforms first instituted by Ivy Lee in the early 20th Century that made public relations communication a more scientific process (Olasky, 1987), quantification of the field provides tangible, numerical data for an industry known more for spin-doctor dialog than ethical practice (Penchansky, 2001; Lovel, 2001). Without such data, the entire industry orchard is left to bear the burden of the few bad apples behind the Enron (Barnes, Barnett, Schmitt & Lavelle, 2002), WorldCom (Kadlec, Fonda & Parker, 2002) and other corporate disasters.

Related, quantification of public relations ethical norms and beliefs is perhaps the ideal way of providing a tangible response to critics on accusations of the field being universally unethical. Taking the next step in quantifying the abundance of current ethical dialog offers concrete proof that actual progress is being made. This proof is essential if the industry is to capitalize on the benefits of globalization.

If this study or the U.S. one that preceded it (Lieber, 2003) is indicative of the industry as whole, attaining this proof should not be difficult to acquire. Australia, New Zealand and U.S. practitioner support for scientific research about public relations ethics has been overwhelmingly positive. Dozens of feedback emails voiced their encouragement for this study, requesting results from this project while offering

assistance in any way they could. Moreover, over 180 individual requests were made for results from the U.S. study (Lieber, 2003), with interest from two additional countries to pursue a cross-cultural one mirroring that just completed.

Research possibilities on this topic are abundant. Australia and New Zealand are only the second phase of a potential global pursuit of knowledge about this topic and vocation. With data obtained from two separate studies as evidence, this appears to be a public relations industry not only ready to answer questions from its critics, but more importantly to seek tangible truths about the ethics of the field and its practitioners.

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APPENDIX A: PUBLIC RELATIONS INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA (PRIA) CODE OF ETHICS

Members shall deal fairly and honestly with their employers, clients and prospective clients, with their fellow workers including superiors and subordinates, with public officials, the communications media, the general public and with fellow members of PRIA.

Members shall avoid conduct or practices likely to bring discredit upon themselves, the Institute, their employers or clients.

Members shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information and shall take care to avoid doing so inadvertently

Members shall safeguard the confidences of both present and former employers and clients, including confidential information about employers' or clients' business affairs, technical methods or processes, except upon the order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

No member shall represent conflicting interests nor, without the consent of the parties concerned, represent competing interests.

Members shall refrain from proposing or agreeing that their consultancy fees or other remuneration be contingent entirely on the achievement of specified results.

Members shall inform their employers or clients if circumstances arise in which their judgment or the disinterested character of their services may be questioned by reason of personal relationships or business or financial interests.

Members practising as consultants shall seek payment only for services specifically commissioned.

Members shall be prepared to identify the source of funding of any public communication they initiate or for which they act as a conduit.

Members shall, in advertising and marketing their skills and services and in soliciting professional assignments, avoid false, misleading or exaggerated claims and shall refrain from comment or action that may injure the professional reputation, practice or services of a fellow member.

Members shall inform the Board of the Institute and/or the relevant State/Territory Council(s) of the Institute of evidence purporting to show that a member has been guilty of, or could be charged with, conduct constituting a breach of this Code.

No member shall intentionally injure the professional reputation or practice of another member.

Members shall help to improve the general body of knowledge of the profession by exchanging information and experience with fellow members.

Members shall act in accord with the aims of the Institute, its regulations and policies.

Members shall not misrepresent their status through misuse of title, grading, or the designation FPRIA, MPRIA or APRIA. (PRIA, 2004).

APPENDIX B: PUBLIC RELATIONS INSTITUTE OF NEW ZEALAND (PRINZ) CODE OF ETHICS

1. Advocacy and Honesty

A member shall:

- i. Provide independent, objective counsel for clients or employers
- ii. Promote the ethical, well-founded views of clients or employers
- iii. Be honest and accurate in all communications - and act promptly to correct erroneous communications.
- iv. Avoid deceptive practices

2. Balancing Openness and Privacy

A member shall:

- i. Promote open communication in the public interest wherever possible.
- ii. Respect the rights of others to have their say
- iii. Be prepared to name clients or employers represented and the sponsors for causes and interests represented
- iv. Safeguard the confidences and privacy rights of present, former and prospective clients and employers

3. Conflicts of Interest

A member shall:

- i. Disclose promptly any existing or potential conflict of interest to affected clients or organisations
- ii. Disclose any client or business interest in published or broadcast editorial work.

4. Law Abiding

A member shall:

- i. Abide by the laws affecting the practice of public relations and the laws and regulations affecting the client.

5. Professionalism

A member shall:

- i. Actively pursue personal professional development
- ii. Explain realistically what public relations activities can accomplish.
- iii. Counsel colleagues on ethical decision-making.
- iv. Decline representation of clients or organisations that urge or require actions contrary to this code
- v. Not engage in irrelevant or unsubstantiated personal criticism. **(PRINZ, 2003).**

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL DEFINING ISSUES TEST DILEMMAS

CLIENT

Roger is a senior executive at Dewitt-Barnaby, a large public relations firm that specializes in servicing controversial clients. Finances are tight at Dewitt-Barnaby, and there's been talk of laying off a fair number of employees unless a new high-paying client is found soon.

Lately there's been a lot of negative publicity about the entire logging industry as a whole. Logging, however, accounts for 10 percent of the area's economy. WoodSource, a big logging company owned by the government, turns to Roger for help.

WoodSource wants Dewitt-Barnaby to mount a forceful counter campaign, and is willing to spend and do whatever it takes to shift public opinion. WoodSource proposes a number of aggressive tactics, including the creation of a fake, pro-WoodSource interest group and intentionally leaking damaging, personal information about the Company's biggest critics. Should Roger accept WoodSource as a client?

1. Other public relations firms are already servicing these kinds of clients; if Dewitt-Barnaby doesn't accept this account someone else certainly will.
2. The kinds of values Roger is promoting by accepting this account.
3. Who cares what happens to the environment anyway?
4. Whether these forms of public relations tactics are legal.
5. It is Roger's duty to society to accept this client and bring an important voice to the marketplace of public opinion.
6. Hundreds of people could lose their jobs if the logging industry falters.
7. What would best serve society?
8. WoodSource makes great furniture.
9. Whether it is legally appropriate for a government to hire public relations firms.
10. This would be a big-paying client; Dewitt-Barnaby really needs the money to help pay its employees.
11. If Dewitt-Barnaby employs these tactics, it would set a bad precedent for the entire public relations industry.
12. Servicing this client will help build Dewitt-Barnaby's reputation as a strong firm.

WHISTLEBLOWER

Elizabeth is the new public relations director for Cross Continent Bank, one of the largest banks in the entire country. This job is a terrific career move for Elizabeth, and she is very excited about working for such a high profile company with so many prestigious clients.

Last week Elizabeth started hearing rumors of a major cover-up of some Cross Continent investments that went awry. With each passing day the rumors grew stronger. By now everyone on her floor was talking about the cover-up. Eventually these rumors reached the ears of a local newspaper reporter.

The reporter asks Elizabeth to comment on what he heard was a Cross Continent cover-up of nearly \$400 million in losses. If Elizabeth confirms the rumors it could seriously damage her company's reputation beyond repair. Also, many people – especially Elizabeth – could lose their jobs if this news gets out. Should Elizabeth tell the reporter what she has heard?

1. Big banks cover up these kinds of thing all the time; there's no reason anyone should expect Cross Continent to be any different.
2. Many of the bank's customers could lose a lot of money if the news gets out.
3. By revealing what she knows, Elizabeth is protecting the value of truth within society.
4. If Elizabeth confirms the rumors, a large amount of bank employees will lose their jobs.
5. Whether as a public relations practitioner Elizabeth has a duty to the public to disclose what she had heard.
6. The interest rates are really low this year.
7. This job is a great career move for Elizabeth; she may never find one this good again.
8. Withholding of information isn't really lying.
9. Reporters are too snoopy; this is none of their business.
10. Cross Continent is breaking the law by what they're doing.
11. What would best serve society?
12. Cheaters like Cross Continent Bank deserve to get caught.

VITA

Paul Stuart Lieber's primary research and teaching interests are in quantitative statistics and methodology, business ethics, and international strategic communication. He is a recognized specialist in analysis and communications of advanced information technology to and through global media, having spearheaded the corporate communications, public relations, and investor relations processes for a multitude of NYSE, NASDAQ and AMEX, multinational entities. Having completed all formal requirements, Lieber will receive a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the Manship School of Mass Communication in May 2005.